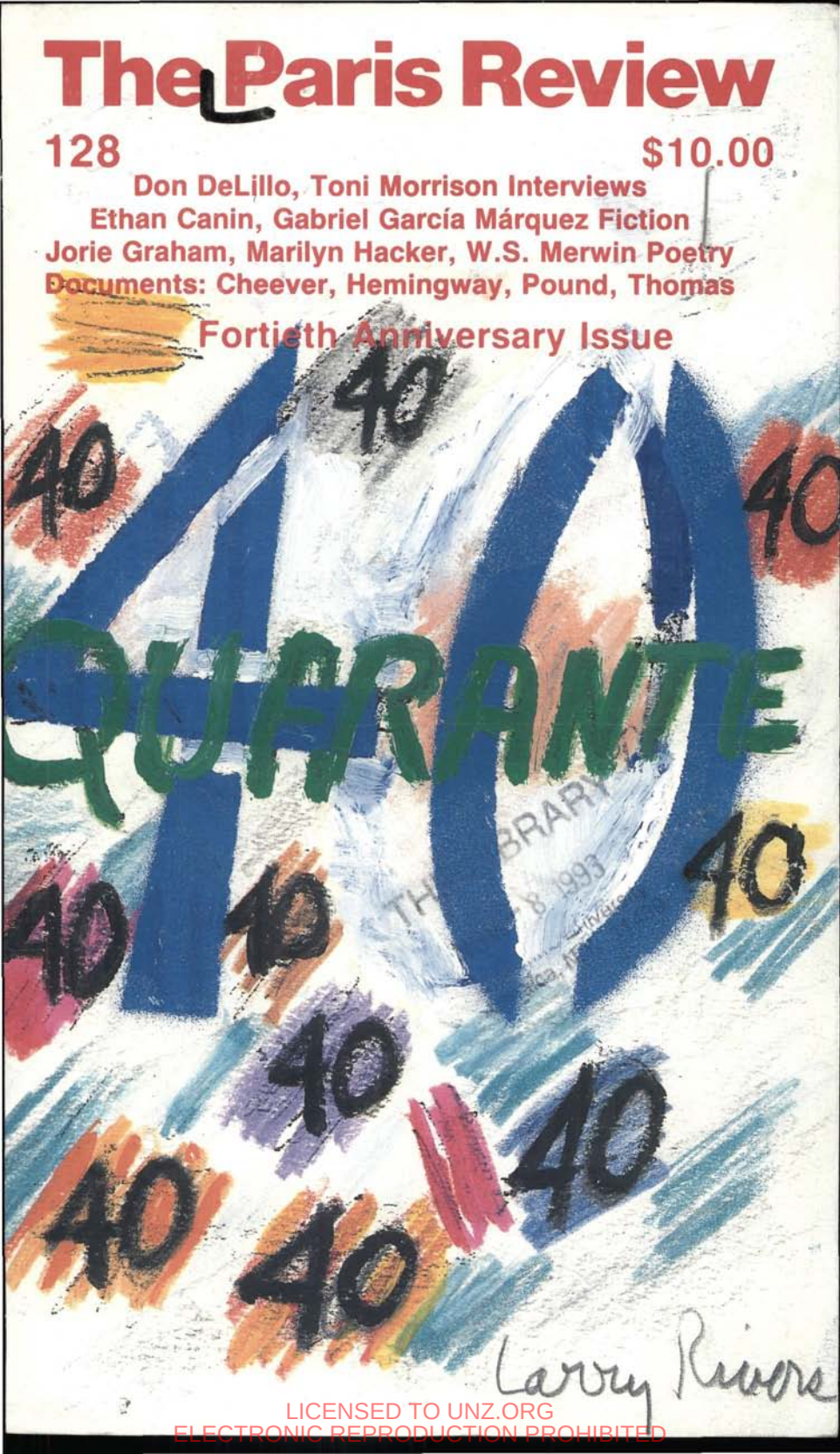
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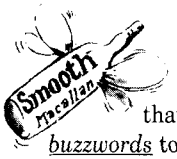
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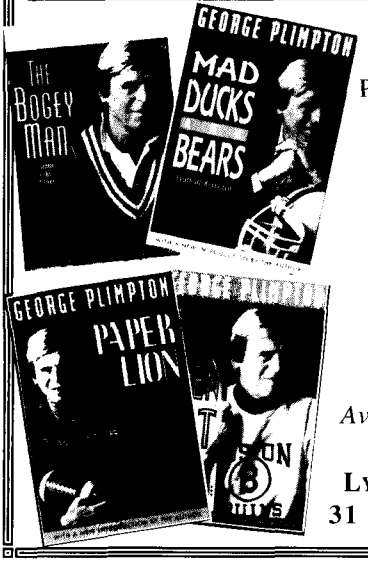
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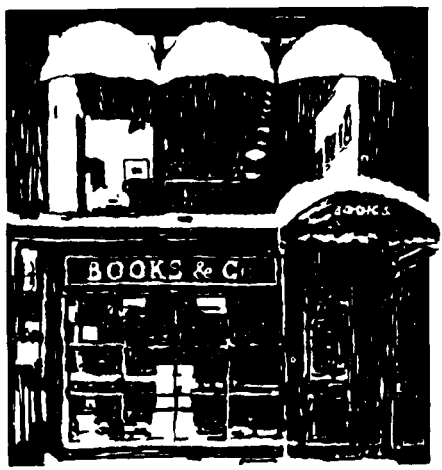
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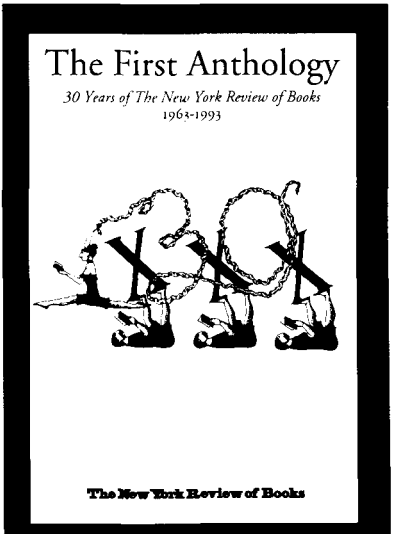
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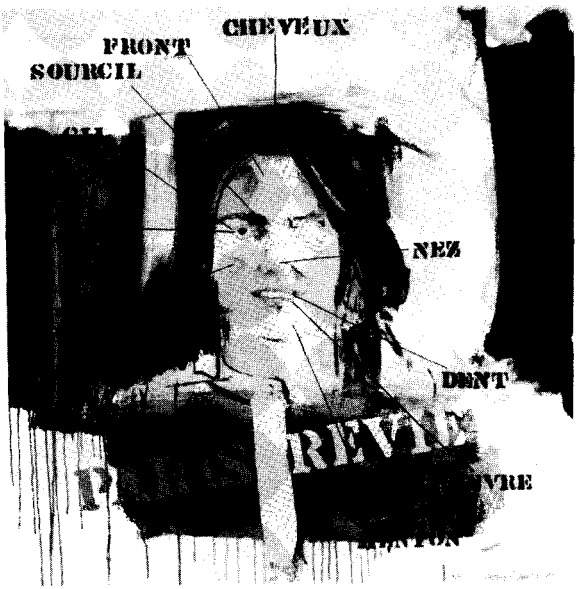
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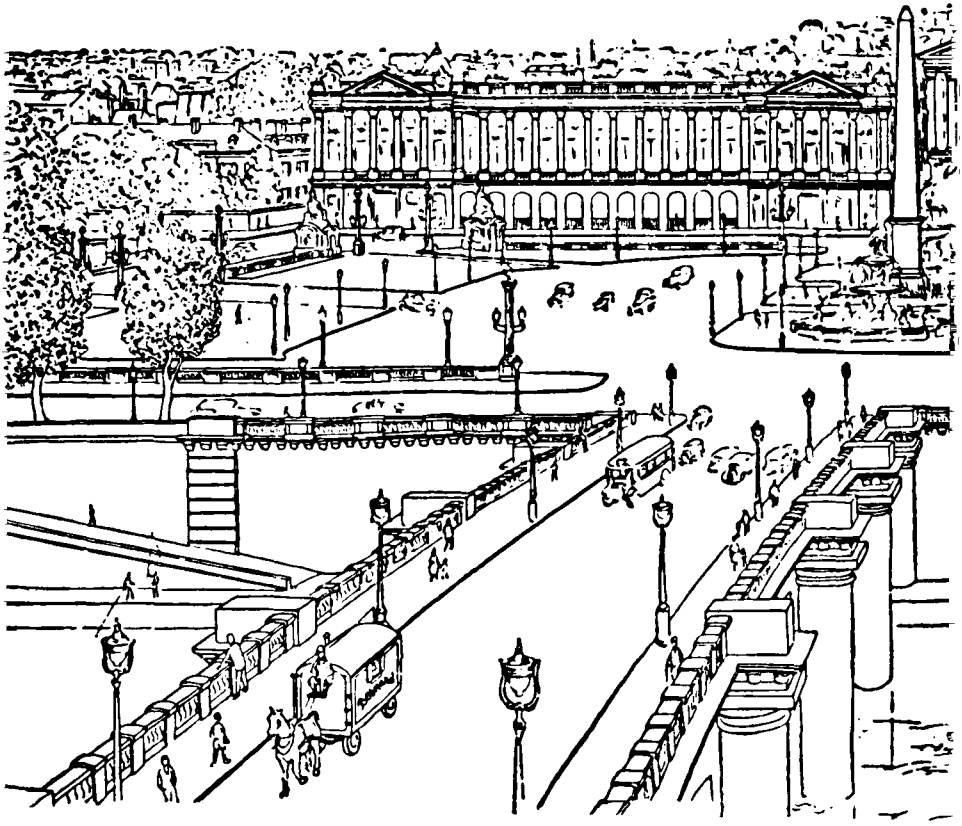
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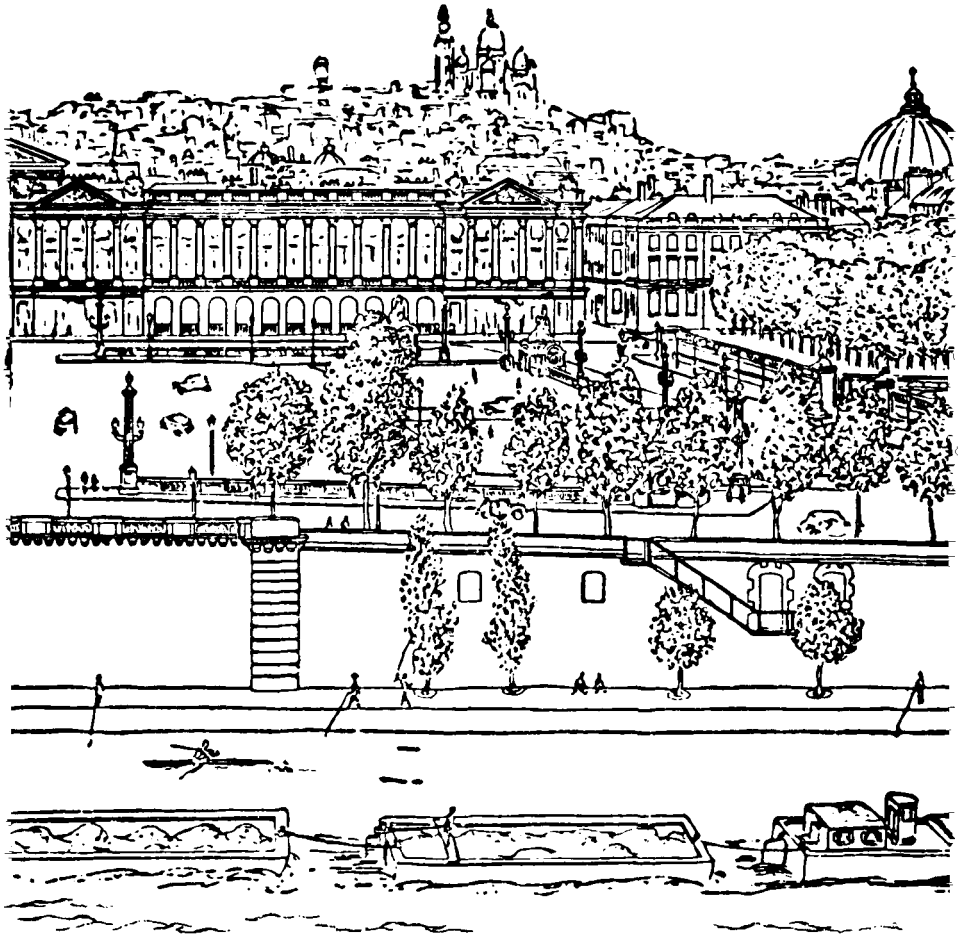
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The Paris Review



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Fireworks at the Long Island party to celebrate The Paris Review*'s fortieth anniversary.*

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Cover by Larry Rivers, *Paris Review*, pencil, colored pencil, oils and felt-tip pen on paper, 1993.

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Notice

As the cover attests, this is *The Paris Review*'s fortieth anniversary, a time for celebration since enterprises of this sort tend to lead fitful if not fateful existences. Indeed, this year did not start out particularly well. For the first time in years the magazine did not receive a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts. The sum—$10,000—is substantial considering our financial situation, which is that the magazine loses money annually and has been doing so since its inception. There are reasons for these troubles: the magazine prints far more pages than it should (over three hundred an issue) and pays its contributors on a scale not much below that of more affluent, large circulation magazines. So we must rely on the beneficence of those who admire what we are trying to do . . . and this includes those who sit on the grant panels. The Literary Publishing Panel found us wanting this year . . . not even a partial grant to make us feel good on our fortieth birthday!

Since it's a government grant, one can request a report to find out the reasons for being turned down—the deliberations of the panel are public. We wrote to ask. Some of us thought that we had been turned down because three years ago our publisher, Deborah Pease, returned the grant in protest of the restrictive clause added to grants following the Mapplethorpe brouhaha—a stand, I might add, for which she and the magazine won the 1990 Open Book Award for First Amendment Courage from the Society of Journalists and Authors. Our suspicions, thank goodness, were ill-founded. In the report, there was first praise for our longevity, and then for a print run very large for a literary magazine (13,000). We were "lauded" for the development of the literary interview, and rather curiously, for reproducing manuscript pages ("which give valuable insight into the way writers work")—an illustration accompanying the interviews that we've always considered

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little more than a throwaway compared to the enormous volume of material provided by the interviews themselves.

Then came the criticisms. The panelists took the magazine to task for being "conservative and bland, thereby limiting its potential impact." Nonsense! Anyone reading *The Paris Review* can hardly ascribe these words to its contents unless one understands them as codewords of a system in which "correctness" is taken to be more important than excellence. As for the odd claim that we have not achieved our "potential impact," isn't that directly refuted by their praise of our high circulation? Then the panelists claimed. "that the magazine rarely published the work of emerging writers, and in many instances it published the same established writers over and over again." Wrong! The panel also disagreed about the value of the interviews with authors (a feature, incidentally, collected over the years into nine volumes by Viking Press), remarking that the ones they'd evaluated seemed "self-congratulatory." Since two of the interviewees in question were Nobel Prize laureates, perhaps it is not all that surprising!

"In short," the report stated, "the panelists agreed that a more adventurous editorial vision would better serve *The Paris Review*'s readers and potential contributors." This last was especially infuriating—rather lordly, sanctimonious advice as if the Endowment panelists were members of a consulting firm.

Particularly dismaying in our case is the fact that the panelists simply got the facts wrong . . . accusing us, for instance, of not publishing "emerging writers" (that dreadful descriptive). Nearly a quarter of the fiction writers published in the four issues under review by the panel had never been published before in this country. As for publishing authors "over and over," it has been a magazine policy here to be very careful about this—not to establish a stable of writers. Sometimes, of course, what is sent in is of such intrinsic value that only the most lunatic of policies would require that it be returned. I can think of only a handful of writers who have appeared three or four times—which considering that we have published

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one hundred and twenty-eight numbers of the magazine, does not seem to fit the term "over and over."

Fortunately, the issues of *The Paris Review* judged by the National Endowment's panel were not seen quite the same way by others. For its fiction *The Paris Review* was picked as one of the four finalists (including *The New Yorker* and *The Atlantic Monthly*) by the American Society of Magazine Editors for the National Magazine Award in fiction. Short stories, essays and poetry were selected by the Pushcart Press, which published what *its* panel considers the best from the literary magazines around the country.

What has preceded is by no means an indictment of the National Endowment or its policies. It performs an invaluable service to literary magazines of all kinds. We are extremely grateful to them for their help in the past. The letter explaining the panel's reservations pointed out that allocations for literary publishing decreased by over $100,000 between 1992 and 1993. Supposedly, *The Paris Review* was on the cusp, and had the allocation remained the same, many presses and magazines, including us, would have been funded. Thus the panel, although we consider its findings questionable in our case, is not so much to blame as the legislators who cut the National Endowment's budget. It is despairing that this country—or at least its Congress—does not consider its artists worthy of the same kind of support given by, say, France, which knows that its cultural heritage is an entity to be supported to the fullest.

In any case, our congratulations to the forty-three magazines that did receive grants . . . admirable grantees all!

One positive result of losing our NEA grant was that we had to scramble around to find funds to make up the difference, if not more. To do this we planned a number of benefits. The most enterprising was a street fair we proposed to have outside the magazine's offices on 72nd Street—in a little park overlooking the East River. Booths were envisioned where writers could sit and sign their books and chat with their readers. So were midway concession booths where writers (both aspiring

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and "emerging") could have their palms read or throw baseballs at wooden milk bottles painted to look like contemporary critics and publishers. A little ferris wheel, perhaps. Poetry "slams" between uptown and the Village. A strength-testing machine rising up twenty-five feet or so, lit by an overhead light, worked by banging a sledge-hammer to send a plunger up its runners towards a fire-alarm bell at the top—the levels marked off with writers' names. A perfect blow would send the disc up past Anita Loos, Louisa May Alcott, George Herbert, Bret Harte, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Dominick Donne, John Gregory Donne, John Donne, Tom Wolfe, Thomas Wolfe, Virginia Woolf, T. S. Eliot on up to Shakespeare, say, or Chaucer which would ring the bell. *Clang*!

Impractical, alas. Very much so. So we retreated to more traditional fundraisers. The Rollows, who are Associates (their seats are actually held by their daughters Delia, age eight, and Lucia, age six) hosted a party on Sue Rollow's parents' estate in Marion, Massachusetts—lovely lawns fronted on three sides by the waters of Narragansett Bay. A flagpole flew a pennant on which was fashioned *The Paris Review* eagle—the bird of the earliest covers with its Phrygian cap, clutching a pen. Writers read from their work in a huge upstairs library. A curious drama entitled "The Judgement of Paris Review" was performed on an outdoor stage. The *Boston Globe* came to the party. Their headline read: "The Paris Review Goes Gatsby." It was not inaccurate. Guests came in white flannels. A seaplane coasted up onto the beach with a group from Martha's Vineyard. A croquet court was in play. There were fireworks from a sandbar offshore. Through a mistake in communication they went off prematurely while William Styron was reading from *Sophie's Choice* to a large group in the library. He continued unruffled as if the bombardment of shells and the lightning flickers through the library windows were phenomenons to which he was quite accustomed.

The editors did not know many of the people who came . . . friends of the Rollows, some who motored down from Boston and Cambridge, others who by word of mouth had

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The audience watching "The Judgement of Paris Review*" at the Marion benefit.*

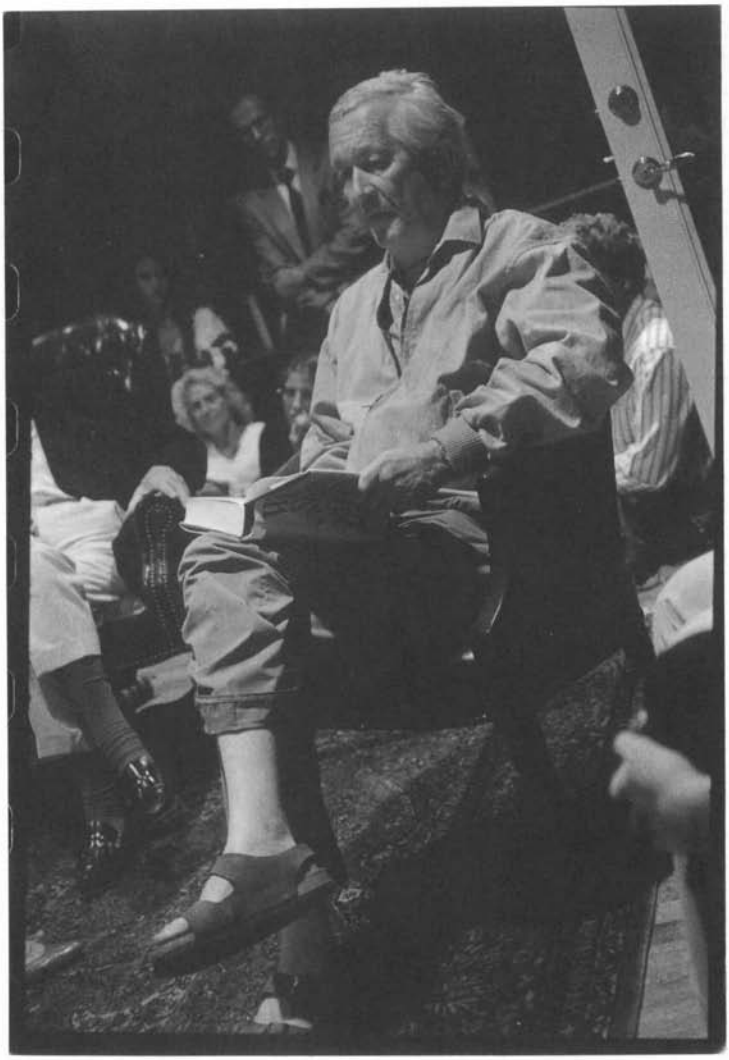
heard of the goings-on in Marion, that a revel with much entertainment to offer was being held to support a literary magazine. Fireworks, what's more! Over two hundred turned up. Enough money was raised to offset the loss of the Endowment grant.

Then in September, another fund-raiser, under the patronage of Montblanc, U.S.A. was held on Long Island on a chilly night at the estate of Anthony Drexel Duke overlooking Three Mile Harbor. Here, the entertainment featured a cancan line and readings from issues of the magazine dating back to 1953—excerpts from Beckett, Céline, Faulkner, Hemingway, Roth, Styron and others read by a lineup of writers and actors, Lauren Bacall, Alec Baldwin, Peter Boyle, Norman Mailer, E.L. Doctorow, Tom Wolfe, Kurt Vonnegut among them. Dancing. Fireworks, of course. I should explain that the undersigned, the Fireworks Commissioner of New York City, has written a large book on fireworks and is so crazed about the things that my friends on such occasions as fund-raising for

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the *Review* assume that a fireworks show should be part of the festivities. This tends to cut into the profits. But then perhaps the people who paid to attend came *because* of the fireworks, which wouldn't surprise me at all!

Some of the festivities this past year have not been fund-



© Alex Forman

William Styron reading at the Marion benefit.

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raisers but simply celebrations of our fortieth year. Indeed, last year there was vague hope that some of us could return to the font itself—Paris, France—and celebrate in the old haunts, Le Chaplain in Montparnasse, the Montana Bar in St. Germain-des-Pres, the Café Tournon on the Avenue Tournon at the base of the Jardin du Luxembourg. This was, of course, too expensive a proposition with or without Endowment funds. The nearest we could come to it was the hamlet of Paris, Mississippi, where we had a catfish fry this spring, and fireworks, of course. A group of us had gone to be part of a seminar sponsored by the University of Mississippi in Oxford, which is about thirty-five miles from Paris. It turns out there are fifteen other Parises in the U.S. and Canada. We wrote to all of them in the hope that our efforts over the years might be recognized, even if by the wrong Paris, with a scroll, a parchment or a city key, even a telegram suitable for framing. Alas, only one Paris responded. The mayor of Paris, Illinois, Frank L. Clinton, wrote a very pleasant letter. He invited us to his city ("known locally as 'The Paris of America'") and said he would provide a guided tour, including a dinner of "genuine" French cuisine. Moreover, the undersigned was asked to assist the coaches of either the high-school football or the basketball teams, depending on the season. The teams are called the Paris Tigers. A brochure reports that every September there is not only an "All-U-Can-Eat" spaghetti supper at the Community center but also a giant flea market on the East Jasper Plaza parking lot. Come July there is a fireworks display in Twin Lakes Park. Paris gets its name, so the mayor's letter tells us, from settlers arriving from Paris, Kentucky. We concur with the mayor's sentiment that "outside of France there may be more than one Paris, but not one better than Paris, Illinois. I believe you will find that although we may lack the grandeur of the Paris in France we more than make up for it in hospitality." Hear! Hear!

A small typewritten notice, taped to the wall in the Paris Review office in New York, reads THIS IS NOT THE JUNIOR LEAGUE. Considering all the functions described above, one

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Jeff Eugenides, James Salter, Peter Maas, Tama Janowitz, Christopher Cerf, Harry Hurt and Jay McInerny in the cancan line at the Long Island benefit.



The Mayor of Oxford, Mississippi, Willie Morris, William Styron, George Plimpton, James Linville and Jeanne McCulloch blowing out the candles on The Paris Review*'s fortieth-birthday cake at Square Books in Oxford.*

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might suppose that these revels are a common adjunct to life at the *Review*. Not so. The editors would much rather concentrate their energies on what they are here for—to assess the near-twenty thousand manuscripts that come in annually in hopes of finding material that suits the required level of quality. That is not only the goal but the pleasure of working in this office.

Perhaps the present issue will indicate this. A word about it. We have collected some remarkable documents, which very much fit a precept that has been of considerable importance to us from the start. This is to offer what can be discerned about the creative process first-hand rather than relying on critics and interpreters, thus, the interview series on the craft of writing started in 1953 with E.M. Forster.

To indicate how exacting the practice of writing can be, we had hoped to publish for the first time the forty-four different endings to *A Farewell to Arms*, which Ernest Hemingway worked on (and kept!) before being satisfied. Alas, at the last minute the endings were withdrawn by Patrick Hemingway, the author's son, who with his brothers is involved in litigation with the Ernest Hemingway Foundation as to the proprietorship of the property. Perhaps we will be able to offer this fascinating portfolio when their differences are resolved.

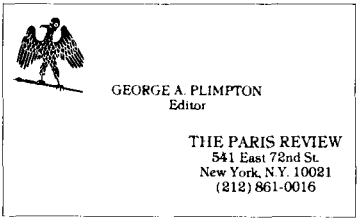
But there is much else: Hemingway's troubles with titles; a curious source of inspiration for F. Scott Fitzgerald in the course of writing *The Great Gatsby*; an example of the difficulties writers can get into with their political beliefs: Ezra Pound's confession to a military officer after his apprehension near Rapallo, Italy in 1945, published here for the first time. Also, Pound's translation of Canto 72, one of the two he wrote in Italian, into English—just recently discovered in the papers of Olga Rudge at the Beinecke Library and introduced by Pound's longtime editor, James Laughlin. Next, a remarkable *mea culpa* letter from Dylan Thomas to Marguerite Caetani, the publisher of the international magazine *Botteghe Oscure*, explaining why his manuscript is late—a model for those writers who find themselves in a similar situation. And finally,

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excerpts from John Cheever's revealing diaries—entries that pertain to writing and the writing business.

This portfolio is, of course, in addition to our regular compliment of short stories (one of them a first publication, *nota bene* NEA panelists!) and poetry.

This notice has gone on longer than most. But there were things to be explained. Perhaps it should end with an aside to those who wish to help the magazine sustain itself—that it is simple to do. I have affixed my calling card, which I occasionally slip into an open pocket and often leave on buses, to make it easy for them.



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The Saint

Gabriel García Márquez

I saw Margarito Duarte, after twenty-two years, on one of the narrow secret streets in Trastevere, and at first I had trouble recognizing him because he spoke halting Spanish and had the appearance of an old Roman. His hair was white and thin, and there was nothing left of the Andean intellectual's solemn manner and funereal clothes with which he had first come to Rome, but in the course of our conversation I began, little by little, to recover him from the treachery of his years and see him again as he had been: secretive, unpredictable and as tenacious as a stonecutter. Before the second cup of coffee in one of our bars from the old days, I dared to ask the question that was gnawing inside me.

"What happened with the Saint?"

"The Saint is there," he answered. "Waiting."

Only the tenor Rafael Ribero Silva and I could understand the enormous weight of his reply. We knew his drama so well that for years I thought Margarito Duarte was the character in search of an author we novelists wait for all our lives, and if I never allowed him to find me it was because the end of his story seemed unimaginable.

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He had come to Rome during that radiant spring when Pius XII suffered from an attack of hiccups that neither the good nor evil arts of physicians and wizards could cure. It was his first time away from Tolima, his village high in the Colombian Andes, a fact that was obvious even in the way he slept. He presented himself one morning at our consulate carrying the polished pine box that was the shape and size of a cello case, and he explained the surprising reason for his trip to the consul, who then telephoned his countryman, the tenor Rafael Ribero Silva, asking that he find him a room at the *pensione* where we both lived. That is how I met him.

Margarito Duarte had not gone beyond primary school, but his vocation for letters had permitted him a broader education through the impassioned reading of everything in print he could lay his hands on. At the age of eighteen, when he was the village clerk, he married a beautiful girl who died not long afterward when she gave birth to their first child, a daughter. Even more beautiful than her mother, she died of essential fever at the age of seven. But the real story of Margarito Duarte began six months before his arrival in Rome, when the construction of a dam required that the cemetery in his village be moved. Margarito, like all the other residents in the region, disinterred the bones of his dead to carry them to the new cemetery. His wife was dust. But in the grave next to hers, the girl was still intact after eleven years. In fact, when they pried the lid off the coffin, they could smell the scent of the fresh cut roses with which she had been buried. Most astonishing of all, however, was that her body had no weight.

Hundreds of the curious, attracted by the resounding news of the miracle, poured into the village. There was no doubt about it. The incorruptibility of the body was an unequivocal sign of sainthood, and even the bishop of the diocese agreed that such a prodigy should be submitted to the judgment of the Vatican. And therefore they took up a public collection so that Margarito Duarte could travel to Rome to do battle for the cause that was no longer his alone or limited to the narrow confines of his village, but had become a national issue.

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As he told us his story in the *pensione* in the peaceful Parioli district, Margarito Duarte removed the padlock and raised the lid of the beautiful trunk. That was how the tenor Ribero Silva and I participated in the miracle. She did not look like the kind of withered mummy seen in so many museums of the world, but like a little girl dressed as a bride who was still sleeping after a long stay underground. Her skin was smooth and warm, and her open eyes were clear and created the unbearable impression that they were looking at us from death. The satin and artificial orange blossoms of her crown had not withstood the rigors of time as well as her skin, but the roses that had been placed in her hands were still alive. And it was in fact true that the weight of the pine case did not change when we removed the body.

Margarito Duarte began his negotiations the day following his arrival, at first with diplomatic assistance that was more compassionate than efficient, and then with every strategy he could think of to circumvent the countless barriers set up by the Vatican. He was always very reserved about the measures he was taking, but we knew they were numerous and to no avail. He communicated with all the religious congregations and humanitarian foundations he could find, and they listened to him with attention but no surprise and promised immediate steps that were never taken. The truth is that it was not the most propitious time. Everything having to do with the Holy See had been postponed until the Pope overcame the attack of hiccuping that proved resistant not only to the most refined techniques of academic medicine, but to every kind of magic remedy sent to him from all over the world.

At last, in the month of July, Pius XII recovered and left for his summer vacation in Castel Gandolfo. Margarito took the Saint to the first weekly audience, hoping he could show her to the Pope, who appeared in the inner courtyard on a balcony so low that Margarito could see his burnished nails and smell his lavender scent. He did not circulate among the tourists who came from around the world to see him, as Margarito had anticipated, but repeated the same statement in six languages and concluded with a general blessing.

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After so many delays, Margarito decided to take matters into his own hands, and he delivered a handwritten letter almost sixty pages long to the Secretariat of State but received no reply. He had foreseen this, for the functionary who accepted it with all due formality did not deign to give more than an official glance at the dead girl, and the clerks passing by looked at her with no interest at all. One of them told him that in the previous year they had received more than eight hundred letters requesting sainthood for intact corpses in various places around the world. At last Margarito requested that the weightlessness of the body be verified. The functionary verified it but refused to admit it.

"It must be a case of collective suggestion," he said.

In his few free hours, and on the dry Sundays of summer, Margarito remained in his room, devouring any book that seemed relevant to his cause. At the end of each month, on his own initiative, he wrote a detailed calculation of his expenses in a composition book, using the exquisite calligraphy of a senior clerk to provide the contributors from his village with strict and up-to-date accounts. Before the year was out he knew the Roman labyrinths as if he had been born there, spoke fluent Italian with as few words as in his Andean Spanish and knew as much as anyone about the process of canonization. But much more time passed before he changed his funereal dress, the vest and magistrate's hat, which in the Rome of that time were typical of certain secret societies with unconfessable aims. He went out very early with the case that held the Saint, and sometimes it was late at night when he returned, exhausted and sad but always with a spark of light that filled him with new courage for the next day.

"Saints live in their own time," he would say.

It was my first visit to Rome, where I was studying at the Experimental Film Center, and I lived his calvary with unforgettable intensity. Our *pensione* was in reality a modern apartment a few steps from the Villa Borghese. The owner occupied two rooms and rented the other four to foreign students. We called her Bella Maria, and in the ripeness of her autumn she

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was good-looking and temperamental and always faithful to the sacred rule that each man is absolute king of his own room. The one who really bore the burden of daily life was her older sister, Aunt Antonietta, an angel without wings who worked for her hour after hour during the day, moving through the apartment with her pail and brush, polishing the marble floor beyond the realm of the possible. It was she who taught us to eat the little songbirds that her husband Bartolino caught—a bad habit left over from the war—and who, in the end, took Margarito to live in her house when he could no longer afford Bella Maria's prices.

Nothing was less suited to Margarito's nature than that house without law. Each hour had some surprise in store, even the early hours of the morning, when we were awakened by the fearsome roar of the lion in the zoo at the Villa Borghese. The tenor Ribero Silva had earned this privilege: Romans did not resent his early practicing. He would get up at six, take his medicinal bath of icy water, arrange his Mephistophelian beard and eyebrows, and only when he was ready, wearing his Scotch-plaid bathrobe, Chinese silk scarf and personal cologne, give himself over, body and soul, to his vocal exercises. He would throw open the window in his room, even when the wintry stars were still in the sky, and begin to warm up with progressive phrasings of great love arias until he was singing at full voice. The daily expectation was that when he sang his *do* at top volume, the Villa Borghese lion would answer him with an earthshaking roar.

"You are the reincarnation of Saint Mark, *figlio mio*," Aunt Antonietta would exclaim in true amazement. "Only he could talk to lions."

One morning it was not the lion who replied. The tenor began the love duet from *Otello: "Già nelle notte densa s'estingue ogni clamor,"* and from the bottom of the courtyard we heard the answer in a beautiful soprano voice. The tenor continued, and the two voices sang the complete selection to the delight of all the neighbors, who opened the windows to sanctify their houses with the torrent of that irresistible love.

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The tenor almost fainted when he learned that his invisible Desdemona was no less a personage than the great Maria Caniglia.

I have the impression that this was the episode that gave Margarito Duarte a valid reason for joining in the life of the house. From that time on he sat with the rest of us at the common table and not, as he had done at first, in the kitchen, where Aunt Antonietta indulged him almost every day with her masterful songbird stew. When the meal was over, Bella Maria would read us the daily newspapers to teach us Italian phonetics and comment on the news with an arbitrariness and wit that brought joy to our lives. One day, with regard to the Saint, she told us that in the city of Palermo there was an enormous museum that held the incorruptible corpses of men, women and children, and even several bishops, who had all been disinterred from the same Capuchin cemetery. The news so disturbed Margarito that he did not have a moment's peace until we went to Palermo. But a passing glance at the oppressive galleries of inglorious mummies was all he needed to make a consolatory judgment.

"These are not the same," he said. "You can tell right away they're dead."

After lunch Rome would succumb to its August stupor. The afternoon sun remained immobile in the middle of the sky, and in the two o'clock silence one heard nothing but water, which is the natural voice of Rome. But at about seven the windows were thrown open to summon the cool air that began to circulate, and a jubilant crowd took to the streets with no other purpose than to live, in the midst of backfiring motorcycles, the shouts of melon sellers, and love songs among the flowers on the terraces.

The tenor and I did not take a siesta. We would ride on his vespa, he driving and I sitting behind, and bring ices and chocolates to the little summer whores who fluttered under the centuries-old laurels in the Villa Borghese and watched for sleepless tourists in the bright sun. They were beautiful, poor and affectionate, like most Italian women in those days,

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and they dressed in blue organdy, pink poplin, green linen, and protected themselves from the sun with parasols damaged by storms of bullets during the recent war. It was a human pleasure to be with them, because they ignored the rules of their trade and allowed themselves the luxury of losing a good client in order to have coffee and conversation with us in the bar on the corner, or ride in the carriages for hire along the paths in the park, or fill us with pity for the deposed monarchs and their tragic mistresses who went horseback riding at dusk along the *galoppatoio*. More than once we served as their interpreters with some foreigner gone astray.

They were not the reason we took Margarito Duarte to the Villa Borghese: we wanted him to see the lion. He lived uncaged on a small desert island in the middle of a deep moat, and as soon as he caught sight of us on the far shore he began to roar with an agitation that astonished his keeper. The visitors to the park gathered round in surprise. The tenor tried to identify himself with his full-voiced morning *do*, but the lion paid him no attention. He seemed to roar at all of us without distinction, but the keeper knew right away that he roared only for Margarito. It was true: wherever he moved the lion moved, and as soon as he was out of sight, the lion stopped roaring. The keeper, who held a doctorate in classical literature from the University of Siena, thought that Margarito had been with other lions that day and was carrying their scent. Aside from that reasoning, which was invalid, he could think of no other explanaiton.

"In any event," he said, "they're roars of compassion, not battle."

And yet, what most affected the tenor Ribero Silva was not that supernatural episode, but Margarito's confusion when they stopped to talk with the girls in the park. He remarked on it at the table, and we all agreed—some in order to make mischief, and others because they were sympathetic—that it would be a good idea to help Margarito resolve his loneliness. Moved by our tender hearts, Bella Maria pressed her hands, covered by rings with imitation stones, against her bosom worthy of a doting biblical matriarch.

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"I would do it for charity's sake," she said, "except that I never could abide men who wear vests."

That was how the tenor rode his vespa to the Villa Borghese at two o'clock in the afternoon and returned with the little butterfly he thought best able to give Margarito Duarte an hour of good company. He had her undress in his bedroom, bathed her with scented soap, dried her, perfumed her with his personal cologne, and dusted her entire body with his camphorated after-shave talc. And then he paid her for the time they had already spent plus another hour and told her step by step what she had to do.

The naked beauty tiptoed through the shadowy house like a siesta dream and gave two gentle little taps at the rear bedroom. Margarito Duarte, barefoot and shirtless, opened the door.

"*Buona sera giovanotto*," she said, with the voice and manners of a schoolgirl. "*Mi manda il tenore*."

Margarito absorbed the shock with great dignity. He opened the door wide to let her in, and she lay down on the bed while he rushed to put on his shirt and shoes to receive her with all due respect. Then he sat beside her on a chair and began the conversation. The bewildered girl told him to hurry because they only had an hour. He did not seem to understand.

The girl said later that in any event she would have spent all the time he wanted and not charged him a cent because there could not be a better behaved man in the world. Not knowing what to do in the meantime, she glanced around the room and saw the wooden case on the mantle. She asked if it was a saxophone. Margarito did not answer, but opened the blind to let in a little light, carried the case to the bed and raised the lid. The girl tried to say something, but her jaw was hanging open. Or as she told us later: "*Mi se gelõ il culo*." She fled in utter terror but lost her way in the hall and ran into Aunt Antonietta who was going to put a new bulb in the lamp in my room. They were both so frightened that the girl did not dare leave the tenor's room until very late that night.

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Aunt Antonietta never learned what happened. She came into my room in such fear that she could not turn the light bulb in the lamp because her hands were shaking. I asked her what was wrong. "There are ghosts in this house," she said. "And now in broad daylight." She told me with great conviction that during the war a German officer had cut the throat of his mistress in the room occupied by the tenor. As she had gone about her work, Aunt Antonietta often saw the ghost of the beautiful victim making her way along the corridors.

"I've just seen her walking naked down the hall," she said. "She was identical."

The city returned to its autumn routine. The flowering terraces of summer closed down with the first winds, and the tenor and I returned to our old haunts in Trastevere where we ate supper with the vocal students of Count Carlo Calcagni and with some of my classmates from film school, among whom the most faithful was Lakis, an intelligent, amiable Greek whose soporific discourses on social injustice were his only fault. It was our good fortune that the tenors and sopranos almost always drowned him out with opera selections that they sang at full volume, but which did not bother anyone even after midnight. On the contrary, some late night passersby would join in the chorus, and the neighbors opened their windows to applaud.

One night, while we were singing, Margarito walked in on tiptoe in order not to interrupt us. He was carrying the pine case that he had not had time to leave at the *pensione* after showing the Saint to the parish priest at San Giovanni di Laterano, whose influence with the Holy Congregation of the Rite was common knowledge. From the corner of my eye I caught a glimpse of him putting it under the isolated table where he sat until we finished singing. As always, just after midnight, when the trattoria began to empty, we would push several tables together and sit in one group—those who sang, those of us who talked about movies, and all our friends. And among them Margarito Duarte, who was already known there as the silent, melancholy Colombian no one knew anything

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about. Lakis, intrigued, asked him if he played the cello. I was caught off guard by what seemed to me an indiscretion that was difficult to handle. The tenor, as uncomfortable as I, could not save the situation. Margarito was the only one who responded to the question with absolute naturalness.

"It's not a cello," he said. "It's the Saint."

He placed the case on the table, opened the padlock and raised the lid. A gust of stupefaction shook the restaurant. The other customers, the waiters, even the people in the kitchen with their blood-stained aprons, gathered in astonishment to see the miracle. Some crossed themselves. One of the cooks, overcome by a feverish trembling, fell to her knees with clasped hands and prayed in silence.

And yet, when the initial commotion was over, we became involved in a shouting argument about the lack of saintliness in our day. Lakis, of course, was the most radical. All that was clear at the end of it was his idea of making a critical movie about the Saint.

"I'm sure," he said, "that old Cesare would never let this subject get away."

He was referring to Cesare Zavattini who taught us plotting and screenwriting. He was one of the great figures in the history of film and the only one who maintained a personal relationship with us outside class. He tried not only to teach us the craft but a different way of looking at life. He was a machine for inventing plots. They poured out of him, almost against his will, and with so much speed that he always needed someone to help him catch them in midflight as he thought them up aloud. His enthusiasm would flag only when he had completed them. "Too bad they have to be filmed," he would say. For he thought that on the screen they would lose much of their original magic. He kept his ideas on cards arranged by subject and pinned to the walls, and he had so many they filled an entire room in his house.

The following Saturday we went to see him with Margarito Duarte. He was so greedy for life that we found him at the door of his house on Angela Merici Street, burning with interest in

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the idea we had described to him on the telephone. He did not even greet us with his customary amiability but led Margarito to a table he had prepared and opened the case himself. Then something happened that we never could have imagined. Instead of going wild, as we expected, he suffered a kind of mental paralysis.

"*Ammazza!*" he whispered in fear.

He looked at the Saint in silence for two or three minutes, closed the case himself and, without saying a word, led Margarito to the door as if he were a child taking his first steps. He said good-bye with a few pats on his shoulder. "Thank you, my son, thank you very much," he said. "And may God be with you in your struggle." When he closed the door he turned toward us and gave his verdict.

"It's no good for the movies," he said. "Nobody would believe it."

That surprising lesson rode with us in the streetcar we took home. If he said it, it had to be true: the story was no good. Yet Bella Maria met us with the urgent message that Zavattini was expecting us that same night, but without Margarito.

We found him in one of his stellar moments. Lakis had brought along two or three classmates, but he did not even seem to see them when he opened the door.

"I have it," he shouted. "The picture will be a sensation if Margarito performs a miracle and resurrects the girl."

"In the picture or in life?" I asked.

He suppressed his annoyance. "Don't be stupid," he said. But then we saw in his eyes the flash of an irresistible idea. "What if he could resurrect her in real life?" he mused, and added in all seriousness:

"He ought to try."

It was no more than a passing temptation, and then he took up the thread again. He began to pace every room, like a happy madman, waving his hands and reciting the film in great shouts. We listened to him, dazzled, and it seemed we could see the images, like flocks of phosphorescent birds that he set loose in a mad flight through the house.

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"One night," he said, "after something like twenty Popes who refused to receive him have died, Margarito goes into his house, tired and old, and he opens the case, caresses the face of the little dead girl and says with all the tenderness in the world: 'For love of your father, my child, arise and walk.'"

He looked at all of us and finished with a triumphant gesture:

"And she does!"

He was waiting for something from us. But we were so befuddled we could not think of a thing to say. Except Lakis the Greek, who raised his hand, as if he were in school, to ask permission to speak.

"My problem is that I don't believe it," he said, and to our surprise he was speaking to Zavattini: "Excuse me, Maestro, but I don't believe it."

Then it was Zavattini's turn to be astonished.

"And why not?"

"How do I know?" said Lakis in anguish. "But it's impossible."

"*Ammazza!*" the maestro thundered in a voice that must have been heard throughout the entire neighborhood. "That's what I can't stand about Stalinists: they don't believe in reality."

For the next fifteen years, as he himself told me, Margarito carried the Saint to Castel Gandolfo in the event an occastion arose for displaying her. At an audience for some two hundred pilgrims from Latin America, he managed to tell his story, amid shoves and pokes, to the benevolent John XXIII. But he could not show him the girl because, as a precaution against assassination attempts, he had been obliged to leave her at the entrance along with the knapsacks of the other pilgrims. The Pope listened with as much attention as he could in the crowd and gave him an encouraging pat on the cheek.

"*Bravo, figlio mio*," he said. "God will reward your perseverance."

But it was during the fleeting reign of the smiling Albino Luciani that he really felt on the verge of fulfilling his dream.

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One of the Pope's relatives, impressed by Margarito's story, promised to intervene. No one paid him much attention. But two days later, as they were having lunch, someone telephoned the *pensione* with a rapid, simple message for Margarito: he should not leave Rome, because some time before Thursday he would be summoned to the Vatican for a private audience.

No one ever found out if it was a joke. Margarito did not think so, and he stayed on the alert. He did not leave the house. If he had to go to the bathroom he announced it: "I'm going to the bathroom." Bella Maria, still witty in the dawn of her old age, laughed her free woman's laugh.

"We know, Margarito," she shouted, "just in case the Pope calls."

The following week, two days before the date specified in the message, Margarito almost collapsed when he saw the headline in the newspaper slipped under the door: *Morto il Papa*. For a moment he was sustained by the illusion that it was an old paper delivered by mistake, for it was not easy to believe that a Pope would die every month. But it was true: the smiling Albino Luciani, elected thirty-three days earlier, had died in his sleep.

I returned to Rome twenty-two years after I met Margarito Duarte, and perhaps I would not have thought about him if we had not met by accident. I was too depressed by the ruinous weather to think about anybody. An imbecilic drizzle like warm soup never stopped falling, the diamond light of another time had turned muddy, and the places that had once been mine and sustained my memories were strange to me now. The house where the *pensione* was located was still the same, but nobody knew anything about Bella Maria. No one answered at the six different telephone numbers that the tenor Ribero Silva had sent me over the years. At lunch with the new movie people, I evoked the memory of my teacher, and a sudden silence fluttered over the table for a moment until someone dared to say:

"*Zavattini? Mai sentito.*"

That was true: no one had heard of him. The trees in the

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Villa Borghese were disheveled in the rain, the *galoppatoio* of the sorrowful princesses had been devoured by weeds with no flowers, and the beautiful girls of long ago had been replaced by athletic androgynes cross-dressed in flashy clothes. The only survivor among all the extinct fauna was the old lion, who suffered from mange and a head cold on his island surrounded by dried waters. No one sang or died of love in the plastic trattorias on the Piazza di Spagna. For the Rome of our memory was by now another ancient Rome within the ancient Rome of the Caesars. Then, a voice that might have come from the beyond stopped me cold on a narrow street in Trastevere:

"Hello, Poet."

It was he, old and tired. Four popes had died, eternal Rome was showing the first signs of decrepitude, and still he waited. "I've waited so long it can't be much longer now," he told me as he said good-bye after almost four hours of nostalgia. "It may be a matter of months." He shuffled down the middle of the street wearing the combat boots and faded cap of an old Roman, ignoring the puddles of rain where the light was beginning to decay. Then I had no doubt, if I ever had any at all, that the Saint was Margarito. Without realizing it, by means of his daughter's incorruptible body, and while he was still alive, he had spent twenty-two years fighting for the legitimate cause of his own canonization.

—translated from the Spanish
by Edith Grossman

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Dylan Thomas



Mea Culpa

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The following letter of Dylan Thomas is addressed to Marguerite Caetani, the editor of the legendary magazine Botteghe Oscure. *Dylan Thomas needs no introduction, but a brief description of his remarkable patroness seems in order.*

Marguerite Chapin was born to a distinguished American family, married the Italian Prince Roffredo Caetani, and came to live in Rome permanently in the years after World War I. There was much gossip at first in the social circles of Boston, New York and Rome, but Marguerite's dignity quickly silenced it. She brought her own great cultivation into the genial philistinism of the Caetani family. She loved modern art and had a collection of paintings on the walls of the Palazzo Caetani. The Caetani brothers had fun turning the pictures upside down to demonstrate how little difference it made, in their view. But the marriage with Roffredo was one of obvious affection.

I came to know Marguerite in 1953 when she wrote to me in New York. She had read my stories in The New Yorker *and asked if I would write for her magazine* Botteghe Oscure. *I knew of this magazine, which she started shortly after World War II. It was tri-lingual; each* quaderno, *or issue, featured the work of writers and poets in French, English and Italian. Marguerite wished to know if I preferred to write in the Italian section or the English section. She had read only my English stories but knew that before I fled Fascist Italy I had written in Italian and continued to do so. In due course, she published me in both languages. The magazine had a great impact in Rome, which was a rather provincial place at the time. She really opened Italy to the world of letters. Soon, most writers and editors in Europe and America knew of* Botteghe Oscure.

My relationship with her was very close. She treated me as a son (I was in my early forties, she in her sixties). Her own son had died, ending the true Caetani line, and her kindness to me was maternal as well as literary. I frequently had dinner

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alone with her and Roffredo in the Palazzo, preferring the company of this gentle, delicate woman to the loud camaraderie of my café friends.

Botteghe Oscure *translates literally as "the dark shops." It is the name of an ancient street which passed along one side of the Circus Flaminius. After the Circus fell into ruins, merchants set up shops in its dark arcades. Palazzo Caetani is situated on the Via delle Botteghe Oscure.*

The publication was founded in 1948 and came out semi-annually until 1960 when Marguerite felt she could no longer continue as editor. It had the unadorned appearance characteristic of European books until recently. The cover is a textured tan; the title, a rich brown, is stamped in large, elegant letters at the top of each edition (some editions are almost 500 pages, with very small print). The quaderno *number is stamped near the bottom in large Roman numerals. There are no advertisements, announcements, illustrations, contributors notes—and no price. Just text.*

In his letter to Marguerite, Dylan Thomas explains with desperate and comic eloquence why he could not "finish the second half of the piece for you." There is nothing to indicate the nature of this "piece," but in Botteghe Oscure *IX, 1952, one finds the answer. In the English section, along with Alexander Trocchi, Carson McCullers, e.e.cummings, James Agee, Richard Wilbur, James Merrill, Paul Goodman, May Sarton and William Jay Smith, is "Llareggub: A Piece for Radio Perhaps" by Dylan Thomas.*

This is the first half of what later became the classic Under Milk Wood, *completed for the BBC just a month before his death at thirty-nine, in 1953.*

—Niccolò Tucci

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The Boat House,
Laugharne,
Carmarthenshire,
Wales.

6 November 1952

My dear Marguerite Caetani,

It was beautiful to have your letter, and it made me a hundred times more ashamed, if that were possible, of my wretched, long, dark silence. Your letter was so warm, and good, as though I had never been barbarously bad to you at all, and as though, almost, I was forgiven for the breaking of promises, the filthy discourtesy incomprehensible to me also, even the whole dead year's dumb insult itself. It was beautiful to hear from you. I don't deserve one warm word but only bashing on the head and then forgetting cold as ice. I don't understand why I never wrote, why I never wrote if only to explain, to explain why I could not, at that time, in spite of my promises, finish the second half of my piece for you. Many times I began a letter, and then put it aside because the piece was not finished. And the drafts of letters piled up, and time lapped on and thickened, putting on skins of distance, and daily, and even more so nightly, I grew more ashamed of my silence and more angry with my procrastination until, at last, I couldn't write at all. I buried my head in the sands of America; flew over America like a damp, ranting bird; boomed and piddled while home was burning; carried with me, all the time, my unfinished letters, my dying explanations and self-accusations, my lonely half of a loony maybe-play, in a heavy, hurtful bunch. Those ostrich griefs were always with me, and I whispered loudest in the late night when, indeed, I was all sand. 'Put it off, put it off', 'It's too late now', 'You can never be forgiven',

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nibble you down to the last loud crumb,' 'Strangle your litter of wits in a sack, and splash!'—these agenbite-deadeners did their long-night worst, but the little voice in the dark, oh, throb, throb, throb it went across Kansas and in all the ovens of the hotel bedrooms. (These pages, I think, are wilting in the grey nearly permanent drizzle that sighs down on to this town and through the birdscratched matchboard roof into my wordsplashed hut. It isn't rain, it must be remorse. The whole fishy bay is soaked in guilt like the bad bits of poems-not-to-be oozing to the marrow on the matchsticked floor, and the half-letters curling and whining in the warped drawers. I'm writing this guilty noise in a cold pool, on a November afternoon, in mists of depression. Forgive me even for this, if you can. I find my pitiful wallow in the drizzle of regret an indulgence I can't pity. This weather gets me like poverty; it blurs and then blinds, creeps chalky and crippling into the bones, shrouds me in wet self, rains away the world.)

I can't explain why I didn't write to explain why I couldn't finish the piece. (No, I can't explain. When I try to explain my fear, the confused symbols grow leaden and a wooly rust creeps over the words. How can I say it? I can't. I can say: One instinct of fear is to try to make oneself as little, as unnoticeable, as possible, to cower, as one thinks, unseen and anonymous until the hunt is past. My fearful instinct is to bloat myself like a frog, to magnify my unimportance, to ring a bell for a name, so that, as I bluster and loom twice my size, the hunt, seeing me monstrous, bays by after different & humbler prey. But that is not what I mean: the symbols have wet-brain, the words have swallowed their tongues.) All that I can't explain. But why I didn't finish the piece there and then, as I said I would, is another matter. I was, as you know, leaving home—though, am, miraculously, home again now in this tumbling house whose every broken pane and wind-whipped-off slate, childscrawled wall, rain-stain, mousehole, knobble and ricket, man-booby-and-rat-trap, I know in my sleep. I was leaving, for ever, it seemed, had nowhere to go, nothing to go with, and, after you had wonderfully helped me to pay

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off some of my many debts here, I went to London, which, to me, is nowhere, and lived by odd reviews—and they were odd, too—odder broadcasts, pretending to women's clubs, putting off, putting off, all the nasty time, the one thing I wanted to do: finish my piece for you, and make my peace. But nothing could happen. Then I went to the States with my luggage of dismays and was loudly lost for months, peddling and bawling to adolescents the romantic agonies of the dead. I made money, and it went, and I returned with none; and once more, with the unfinished letters, poems, and play weighing much more heavily now on a mind nearly out of its mind with its little, mountainous anxieties and aches, reviewed, begged, lectured, broadcast, waited, with no hope, for the time when I could come back here and write truly again. I waited, and I put off, full of fears and wishes.

It is all a very inadequate explanation, and it cannot call itself an excuse, and indeed my fears are inexcusable though very real to me in their mean, mad way. And my talk, though terribly but weakly true, of 'putting off' all the time, is terribly putting off, I know.

These are the reasons, however—and expressed in depression and with little hope of them being believed or thought worthy—for my silence and my broken promises. About John Davenport and René Char, I had heard nothing until your letter; and, even if I had heard, how could that, in any way in the world, affect you and me: your goodness to me, your faith in me, and my affection and gratitude kept, so it would appear, so obstinately secret?

I'm trying to work again now, and faithfully promise you the rest of the thing, and whatever other work I have, by, at the latest, the first of February. I won't fail you. Or have I joined forever the folds of the snarling and letting-down black once-friendly sheep? Oh, I do hope not.

It is so difficult for me to live and keep my family alive. There are many petty jobs which would make me just not enough money for tradesmen and rent, for clothes and school, for parents, shoes, and cigarettes, but these petty jobs, by

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their nature and by the time they claim, stop me from writing as I would wish to write. But how, without these jobs, am I to live, to write, at all? These problems keep me treadmilling small nightmares all the waking nights.

About another visit to the States, I don't know. Though I can only play a poet there, and not make poetry, yet there I can, if only for a few months, live and send money home. I may have to go again. I cannot go on thinking all the time of butchers and bakers and grocers and cobblers and rates and rents until I bleed. After I have finished what I am now working on, I may have to give up writing altogether. (My need—as I imagine it—to write, may be all conceit. The bellows that fan the little flicker is nothing but wind, after all. And writing is certainly not one of the ancient secrets of the head-shrinking tribes. Ach, my endless bleating of private woes because I am not "allowed" to write, as though the trees would grow inward, like toenails, if I renounced this passion for self-glorification. "Peace, let me write. Gag the tradesmen, I must write. Alms, for the love of writing." Perhaps I should be better off pulling teeth. But even this momentary disgust I blame upon the weather. And even this disgust is "material for writing" just as trees, and toenails, and glorification, and teeth.) I think it's time to stop this. I wanted, at first, only to say that I am profoundly ashamed of my silence and of my broken promises, and that I will not fail you again, and that I do, with all the bloody muscle of my heart, ask for your forgiveness. But the letter got caught up with my despairs, though, always, I want, one day, to write you a happy letter. Because I am very often happy, and not always, here by the sea, without cause.

Please forgive me, and try to trust me again.

The old, cold pool of the day is a little warmer now.

Yours ever,
Dylan.

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Three Poems by W.S. Merwin

Night Singing

Long after Ovid's story of Philomela
has gone out of fashion and after the testimonials
of Hafiz and Keats have been smothered in comment
and droned dead in schools and after Eliot has gone home
from the Sacred Heart and Ransom has spat and consigned
to human youth what he reduced to fairy numbers
after the name has become slightly embarrassing
and dried skins have yielded their details and tapes have been
slowed and analyzed and there is nothing at all
for me to say one nightingale is singing
nearby in the oaks where I can see nothing but darkness
and can only listen and ride out on the long note's
invisible beam that wells up and bursts from its
unknown star on on on never returning
never the same never caught while through the small leaves
of May the starlight glitters from its own journeys
once in the ancestry of this song my mother visited here
lightning struck the locomotive in the mountains
it had never happened before and there were so many
things to tell that she had just seen and would never
have imagined now a field away I hear another
voice starting up and on the slope there is a third
not echoing but varying after the lives
after the goodbyes after the faces and the light
after the recognitions and the touching and tears
those voices go on rising oh if I knew I would hear
in the last dark that singing I know how I would listen

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Hölderlin at the River

The ice again in my sleep it was following someone
it thought was me in the dark and I recognized its white
tongue
it held me in its freezing radiance until I
was the only tree there and I broke and carried
my limbs down through dark rocks calling to the summer
where are you where will you be how could I have missed you
gold skin the still pond shining under the eglantines
warm peach hanging in my palm at noon among flowers
all the way I was looking for you and I had nothing to show
until the last day of the world then far below I could see
the great valley as night fell the one ray withdrawing
like the note of a horn and afterwards black wind took
all I knew but here is the foreign morning with its clouds
sailing on water beyond the black trembling poplars
the sky breathless around its blinding fire and the white flocks
in water meadows on the far shore are flowing past their
silent shepherds only once now I hear the hammer
ring on the anvil and where I cannot see it
a bird of the ice is singing of its own country
if any of this remains it will not be me

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The Stone

These junipers growing out from the yellow rocks
now in the sunlight near the top of the steep slope
under its split cliff face and these dwarf oaks returning
in silence not yet believing after so long
out of life and this hawthorn with its white light in flower
this tangle of hazel and eglantine drawing
tight below the cliff where the hidden water slips out
from its green lips darkening the stone in every
season and nursing a trailing shadow of horsetail
and osiers below it these fresh holes clawed in the ocher
clay these traces of fox and badger these invaders
have come back from before there were names for this place
before my friend Herault planted the pear trees here
that have gone back to be quinces flowering with
the wild things and planted the peaches and the rest
of the late orchard that is dry wood covered with moss
and before the Cavannes harvested their grapes here
for generations when the whole village tilled the slopes
by hand and before the road from the valley was a cart lane
and before the Romans and before it was understood
that the source in the cliff and the vipers living
in the rocks were the same woman and that when they rolled
back into one brain they made from their breath a stone
that would float in the air like a forgotten day

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Cynthia Macdonald

The Dreamer on the Stone Couch Dreams and Wakes

1. The Young Woman Who Lies in a Shoe

A woman of wool lies on a couch covered with pale shawls.
The way it holds her, she and the couch are almost one.
Cold fingers the shawls but she is warm. Though gravely ill.
Her family is wreathed around her. She lies in the living room
Of their shoe, which will soon become the dying room.

To her mother who remembers how they laid them out
In the old country, the coffee table beside the couch is a board
Where they will turn her daughter in a winding sheet;
To her husband, the table is a coffin; to her children,
A headstone, much like the headboard of the bed she no longer
Inhabits because she wishes to be with them to the last.
And to her baby girl, the table is a place different from
The hilly warmth of mother. It is evening: clear twilight.
Her husband remembers spring nights when they first met,
How they knit together and never raveled.
The woman breathes her last—the baby atop her—
And her flesh begins to harden, wool to wood.

2. The Young Woman Who Died in a Shoe

A woman lies on a couch, plumped pillows behind her head.
Lies come from her mouth like time-lapse films of a tree
Bursting into leaf—that she is not in pain, that she will not die.
Her baby crawls out of her, pushed out by a growth,
Her second pregnancy in nine months. The family
Gathers around her, crying. She has small elegant feet,
One clad in a fine shoe. In this nursery
Even what is dead is green.

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3. The Man Whose Young Wife Died

The man is lying on a stone couch—the sidewalk where it meets
The church's wall. He is trying to feed tidbits of a hot dog bun
To the baby who cannot eat. In his pocket the green shoe;
Its high heel causes him pain which
Reminds him of Parsifal, the unhealed wound of Amfortas
And how the baby in his arms entered the world.
He hums a phrase of the opera as if it were
Food snagged from the trash can.
The other children have been disposed of by agencies.
He should take the baby to Bellevue. He will
As soon as his wool wife comes home to lie with him.

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Two Poems by Susan Wood

Geography

Summer afternoon, Henry James said,
the most beautiful words in the language.
I wonder if he saw those summer afternoons

in California when the fog
sneaks in like a man with something
to hide. Sometimes he stays the night, sometimes

he's gone by dusk, the guilty lover who takes
his hands from a woman's face just in time
to get home for supper, though he's forgotten

the telltale signs, that he's left behind
a scarf, a glove, wisps of himself
for her to remember. Climbing a foggy hill

I thought the lover must be Japanese
he'd left such elegant drawings—a bridge,
the long hair of willows, a garden of black ink

traced on a lavender sky. He might have been
a lover I had once, a continent away. Each day
he'd face the red persimmon of the rising sun and dream

of home, though he went on making music
in his head. Each night he played a Chopin nocturne,
the passage where the music wavers like a face

mirrored in water and the composer sees,
just for a moment, his own death.
Think of Henry James in the Orient! That's how wrong

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it felt to be apart from everything
he loved. It's what I feel sometimes when I think
of hills, who grew up in flat country.

I've been told, and believe, that we carry within us
a past we've never seen. I've never been
to Ireland, but sometimes, summer afternoons,

a girl stands on a hill above the harbor at Galway,
the emerald grass kissing the dewy hem of her skirt.
It is the nineteenth century and far away

she sees sailors loading crates of barley
on a ship. Here everyone is starving! Soon
she'll be going to America. A little in love

with her own recklessness, she imagines herself
on the deck, at night, in fog, a few possessions—
the rosary her mother gave her, a black-haired boy's

tortoiseshell comb—stuffed in her pockets,
wisps of themselves for her to remember,
everything before her facing home.

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Swamp

Once, at the bottom of summer,
we pushed on—Caitlin and Jill and Peter
and I—through the heat which lay
like a thick sheet of glass over everything,
the trees only a smoke screen

for the scorching air. Exhausted,
we wanted to go home, but Caitlin wanted
to see the alligators—she was two,
she wouldn't take no for an answer! We came out
of the stifling tunnel of trees

into the swamp, the sun
pressing everything flat as a photograph,
no life anywhere, not even
a ripple ruffling the dark hair of the water.
Then Peter's dog barked

and ran to the swamp grass,
a smudge of gray ash in the fire. Calling him,
we turned to go. Suddenly, she came
out of nowhere, came straight toward us, hissing
and flashing a mouthful of swords,

the heavy board of her tail beating
the air. Maybe she had babies nearby, maybe she
only protected her young, as anyone
would, but we didn't wonder, we scooped up
the dog and the baby and ran as fast

and as far as we could down the path
where she wouldn't follow. The good news,
Jill said, is they don't eat you
alive, tearing the flesh from your bones so that
you feel every rip. The bad news:

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that they pull you like a lover
down to their lair on the mud-slick bottom,
to have you and keep you
and eat you, one sweet morsel at a time.
We couldn't stop laughing,

laughing because we were safe,
because Caitlin was safe, and the dog was safe,
all of us safe. We might be
limp and shaken and scared, red-faced and panting,
but we were alive, that moment, there,

in the shade, under the green scarves
of the leaves. That's the good news. And what is
the bad news? We know, but don't
say it, that something will come for us, sooner
or later, something will come

out of nowhere, out of the swamp,
hissing and gaping, and this time it won't stop—
nothing will stop its mud-black heart—
until it takes us with it, under, down to the dark,
rank grave of the water.

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Frederick Tibbetts

Three Figures

I. Peter Healing with His Shadow
(Masaccio)

His shadow in the frescos
Is the first admitted
Into a picture. Before this,
The sick people waited
Centuries in the heat
Along the brilliant alley
For there to be a shadow
For the apostle to cast.
Now, as it passes over,
It affords each of them
And the brightly-painted alley
Miraculous relief. With
What thanks must they
Greet this mite of obscurity
Allowing, momentarily, sides
That are free from light.

II. The Finding of the Body of Mark
(Tintoretto)

Of himself, Mark writes only
That, after the arrest, "there
Followed a certain young man
With a linen cloth around him.
When they laid hold of him,
He left the linen cloth and fled
Naked."

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—High up along a wall
In the immense vaulted gallery
Are tombs, where the Venetians
Are busily seeking him. From
Ladders, they lower the next
Body. The whole scene
Is lit as if by a storm.
Were they to turn around,
They'd see an appearance of
Mark, standing over his own body,
Which has been taken down
Already, and is lying stretched
On its cloth, on the ground.

III. The Competition Panels
(Ghiberti and Brunelleschi)

The Gothic quatrefoil is given—
To fill in with the parts of the story.
So there must be one parabolic crag
To stand for the mountains.
There must be a piece of brush
For the ram to tangle in, and the ram.
There must be an ass to have climbed up
Who had a bundle on her back
With which to make a fire.
Two servants tend her.
She's drinking from a wisp of spring.
An ornate altar
Has been raised, for Isaac
To kneel upon, tied-in and small.
There must be room for his father
To strike the blow. And,
In one of the upper rounds,
Across from the crag, a place
For the messenger to lift one hand
And cause the story to stop.

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Two Poems by Pattiann Rogers

God Alone

It was important on this April night
to open the windows, all of them, east
and on the west, pushing the panes
as high as they would go, to allow
the wind free passage through the rooms,
to allow the night occupancy
as if it were a word come into the body
to render the bones definitive.

And the house became the spring
night—the hallway a vernal hallway
rushed with flowing field grasses, all
the tugs and crescents of sex-in-flight.
The wooden casements, railings and rungs,
were carved, their curves traced,
by the calls of peepers, crickets,
killdeer, those cries possessing
every mirror too, in and out, like streaks
and bells of light. Quilts and counterpanes
became shadowed with yellow-budded willow
and lilac priorities, like patterns
laid out, wound and stitched fast.
In the dark, a garden of grape,
honeysuckle and rosmarin took root,
spreading, blooming, vining a leafy
network through the bedroom mid-air.

And the April night, rich with black
stellar vacancies and portents, became
the house, took the grace of pliant
curtains lifting and parting, took

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the form of doorways, cornices,
ceilings, pressed to the frame of every
room angle, curled inside the painted
rings and links of porcelain curios
on the shelves, settled in the open
drawers of the bureau, the hollowness
beneath the bed, became fluted
with the fanned linen of the lampshade,
rigid with the wooden chair, spindled
with beveled legs and back. Shaping
itself to faces and fingers, the night
became human. It gave and received
the same breath with all who slept there.

Divine is the spring night filling
the house with fragrant tumblings,
with the cylindrical sounds and high-climbing
purposes of a sun-tilted earth; and equally divine
are the rooms providing the boundless black
with measurement, with place, with the reflections
and honor of artifact; and equally divine
is the hand that raised all the sashes.

Life in an Expanding Universe

It's not only all those cosmic
pinwheels with their charging solar
luminosities, the way they spin around
like the paper kind tacked to a tree trunk,
the way they expel matter and light
like fields of dandelions throwing off
waves of summer sparks in the wind,
the way they speed outward,
receding, creating new distances
simply by soaring into them.

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But it's also how the noisy
crow enlarges the territory
above the landscape at dawn, making
new multiple canyon spires in the sky
by the sharp towers and ledges
of its calling; and how the bighorn
expand the alpine meadows by repeating
inside their watching eyes every foil
of columbine and sweet pea vetch, all
the stretches of sedges, the candescences
of rocks and blades existing there.

And though there isn't a method
to measure it yet, by finding
a golden-banded skipper on a buttonbush,
by seeing a blue whiptail streak
through desert scrub, by looking up
one night and imagining the fleeing
motions of the stars themselves, I know
my presence must swell one flutter-width
wider, accelerate one lizard-slip farther,
descend many stellar-fathoms deeper
than it ever was before.

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Three Poems by Karen Volkman

Persephone at Home

No good reflecting on what might have been
if I'd been different—no straying
after foreign flowers, no hunger
for bitter fruit. In the beginning—

such a child—I thought it punishment,
not fate. It is daylight I miss
mainly. What we are granted of sun here
is a dim relentless red. I wander

the reeking river, I pat
fat Cerberus on his many manic heads.
The moldy skiff makes its incessant
prompt arrivals, so efficient,

our dutiful Charon growling orders
from the prow. Huge-eyed, uncomprehending,
the new recruits stare round. Wives still
clutching their washing, wailing children,

soldiers bloodstained and battered
from the latest engagement.
Then that blessed briny sip, welcome
oblivion—they're blank as babies.

All night the shrieks of the tortured serenade
our marriage bed. Once it lulled
me rigid. For years after that
first celebrated rape,

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I lay cold beneath his coldness,
stiff in his stiff embrace.
I'll give no prince to this kingdom.
That thing is dead.

For years, he broke me for it.
For years, I bled and bled.
That was then. Queen
of this blasphemous backwater,

I make my claim. On earth,
I am virginal abundance, fat and full.
Here, bony and empty, I straddle
my killer, my captor, my grief, my bane,

and tear and take
the torn lip, the raked neck, the aching thighs
that will remind me
through the long black morning

I am alive.

Looking Back

We forgot our coats, shoes,
left everything in a jumble,
stumbling barefoot on the rutted plain,
the blunt heat pressing at our necks
like an anxious question.

I loved my garden.
Loved the fat diameter
of the cow's girth, her somber lowing,
the soft scuff of my daughters' footsteps
on the bare swept floor,

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our littered streets, the carters' cries
near the ramparts
strident at dawn. Was it
for this then? For *sin*?
For living? Were my herbs
leafy idols, calamitous

in their dainty pots?
Was it for this
they scourged us,
those keepers of abstraction
staunch in a gauzy heaven,
because we loved

inexpertly, inaccurately,
what would not stay?
All smoky diadems,
that ephemera.
I saw it.

I have no hands now
to touch or take.
I am all eye.
Memory and motionless witness
and salt my substance

preserves and keeps,
preserves and keeps—
and over everything
the unsmiling white faces, repeating
for goodness, *for goodness*, *for goodness*.

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Equations

The moon isn't looking for solutions.
She's grown accustomed
to partialities,

that accretion
of absence, her black scarves
plucked from the top hat

one by one.
Then a miraculous
cumulus, removeless

completion.
Stoic mathematician,
efficient wizard,

reveal your secrets.
A lover
is going, some lover is always

going. Such curious
quadratics that
will not leave me whole.

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American; it could be Catholic, it could be Midwestern. I'm those things too, and they are all important.

INTERVIEWER

Why do you think people ask, "Why don't you write something that we can understand?" Do you threaten them by not writing in the typical western, linear, chronological way?

MORRISON

I don't think that they mean that. ~~When they say~~, "Are you ever going to write a book about white people?" ~~they think that~~ that's a kind of a compliment. They're saying, "You write well enough, I would even let you write about me." I couldn't say that to anybody else. I mean, could I ~~go~~ up to Andre Gide and say, "Yes, but when are you going to get serious and start writing about black people?" I don't think he would know how to answer that question. Just as I don't. He would say, "What?" "I will if I want" or "Who are you?" What is behind that question is, there's the center, which is ~~you~~, and then there are these regional blacks or Asians, sort of marginal people. That question can only be asked from the center. Bill Moyers asked me that when-are-you-going-to-write-about question on television. I just said, "Well, maybe one day ..." but I couldn't say to him, you know, you can only ask that question from the center. The center of the world! I mean he's a white male. He's asking a marginal person, "When are you going to get to the center? When are you going to write about white people? ~~But I can't say, "Leo Tolstoy, when are you gonna write about black people?~~ I can't say, "Bill, why are you asking me that question?" The point is that he's ~~complacent~~; he's saying, "You write

A page from the corrected draft of Toni Morrison's Writers-at-Work interview.

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Toni Morrison

The Art of Fiction CXXXIV

Toni Morrison detests being called a "poetic writer." She seems to think that the attention that has been paid to the lyricism of her work marginalizes her talent and denies her stories their power and resonance. As one of the few novelists whose work is both popular and critically acclaimed, she can afford the luxury of choosing what praise to accept. But she does not reject all classifications, and in fact, embraces the title "black woman writer." Her ability to transform individuals into forces and idiosyncrasies into inevitabilities has led some critics to call her the "D.H. Lawrence of the black psyche." She is also a master of the public novel, examining the

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relationships between the races and sexes and the struggle between civilization and nature, while at the same time combining myth and the fantastic with a deep political sensitivity.

Born Chloe Wofford in 1931 in Lorain, Ohio, a steel town on the banks of Lake Erie, Morrison sets many of her novels in the Midwest, in part because it is what she knows, but, more importantly, because the black experience she wants to dramatize is neither stereotypically inner-city ghetto nor deep-South plantation. It was in Lorain that she learned the importance of community, which she has described as being "both a support system and a hammer." She grew up hearing folk tales of the supernatural, and her own grandmother kept a dream book she believed enabled her to foretell the future. But it was Morrison's father who taught her to look at the world critically and question white standards of beauty and success. He worked three jobs during the Depression and distrusted "every word and every gesture of every white man on earth."

After graduating from Howard University, where she acquired the nickname Toni, she went on to get a master's degree in English at Cornell University. She then taught at Texas Southern University and Howard University. While at Howard she joined an informal writer's workshop to which she took "the old junk" she'd written in high school until her stockpile was depleted, and she was forced to compose a new story, a tale of a black girl who dreams of having blue eyes. This would become Morrison's first novel, The Bluest Eye, *which was published in 1969. By the time her first book was published, Morrison was thirty-eight, divorced and had left Howard for a job as a textbook editor at Random House. Later she became an editor in the trade book division concentrating on bringing in books by black Americans like Toni Cade Bambara, Gayle Jones, Angela Davis and Muhammed Ali. At the same time she found time to write essays, criticism and two novels. In 1977, her third novel,* Song of Solomon, *was chosen as a Book-of-the-Month Club selection (the first novel by a black writer to be chosen since Richard Wright's* Native Son *in 1940) and*

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won the National Book Critics' Circle Award. It was only then that she decided to quit her day job and make a "genuine commitment" to writing. In 1988 her fifth novel, Beloved, *won the Pulitzer Prize. Her most recent novel,* Jazz, *is a literary improvisation which has received great critical praise. Ms. Morrison, who has been teaching American literature and creative writing at Princeton University for the last four years, learned, just as this issue was going to press, that she had been named the recipient of the 1993 Nobel Prize for literature.*

We talked with Ms. Morrison one summer Sunday afternoon on the lush campus of Princeton University. The interview took place in Ms. Morrison's office, which is decorated with a large Helen Frankenthaler print, pen and ink drawings an architect did of all the houses that appear in her work, photographs, a few framed book-jacket covers and an apology note to her from Hemingway—a forgery meant as a joke. On her desk is a blue glass tea cup emblazoned with the likeness of Shirley Temple filled with the number two pencils that she uses to write her first drafts. Pots of jade sit in a window and a few more plants hang above. A coffeemaker and cups are at the ready. Despite the high ceilings, the big desk and the high-backed black rocking chairs, the room had the warm feeling of a kitchen, maybe because talking to Morrison about writing is the intimate kind of conversation that often seems to happen in kitchens; or perhaps it was the fact that as our energy started flagging she magically produced mugs of cranberry juice. We felt that she had allowed us to enter into a sanctuary, and that, however subtly, she was completely in control of the situation.

Outside, high canopies of oak leaves filtered the sunlight, dappling her white office with pools of yellowy light. Morrison sat behind her big desk, which, despite her apologies for the "disorder," appeared well organized. Stacks of books and piles of paper resided on a painted bench set against the wall. She is smaller than one might imagine, and her hair, gray and silver, is woven into thin steel-colored braids that hang just at shoulder length. Occasionally during the interview Morrison let her sonorous, deep voice break into rumbling laughter and

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punctuated certain statements with a flat smack of her hand on the desktop. At a moment's notice she can switch from raging about violence in the United States to joyfully skewering the hosts of the trash TV talk shows through which she confesses to channel-surfing late in the afternoon, assuming her work is done.

INTERVIEWER

You have said that you begin to write before dawn. Did this habit begin for practical reasons, or was the early morning an especially fruitful time for you?

TONI MORRISON

Writing before dawn began as a necessity—I had small children when I first began to write, and I needed to use the time before they said, "Mama"—and that was always around five in the morning. Many years later, after I stopped working at Random House, I just stayed at home for a couple of years. I discovered things about myself I had never thought about before. At first I didn't know when I wanted to eat, because I had always eaten when it was lunchtime or dinnertime or breakfast-time. Work and the children had driven all of my habits . . . I didn't know the weekday sounds of my own house; it all made me feel a little giddy.

I was involved in writing *Beloved* at that time—this was in 1983—and eventually I realized that I was clearer-headed, more confident and generally more intelligent in the morning. The habit of getting up early, which I had formed when the children were young, now became my choice. I am not very bright or very witty or very inventive after the sun goes down.

Recently I was talking to a writer who described something she did whenever she moved to her writing table. I don't remember exactly what the gesture was—there is something on her desk that she touches before she hit the computer keyboard—but we began to talk about little rituals that one goes through before beginning to write. I, at first, thought I didn't have a ritual, but then I remembered that I always get

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up and make a cup of coffee while it is still dark—it must be dark—and then I drink the coffee and watch the light come. And she said, well, that's a ritual. And I realized that for me this ritual comprises my preparation to enter a space that I can only call nonsecular. . . . Writers all devise ways to approach that place where they expect to make the contact, where they become the conduit, or where they engage in this mysterious process. For me, light is the signal in the transition. It's not being *in* the light, it's being there *before it arrives*. It enables me, in some sense.

I tell my students one of the most important things they need to know is when they are their best, creatively. They need to ask themselves, What does the ideal room look like? Is there music? Is there silence? Is there chaos outside or is there serenity outside? What do I need in order to release my imagination?

INTERVIEWER

What about your writing routine?

MORRISON

I have an ideal writing routine that I've never experienced, which is to have, say, nine uninterrupted days when I wouldn't have to leave the house or take phone calls. And to have the space: a space where I have huge tables. I end up with this much space (*she indicates a small square spot on her desk*) everywhere I am, and I can't beat my way out of it. I am reminded of that tiny desk that Emily Dickinson wrote on, and I chuckle when I think, "Sweet thing, there she was." But that is all any of us have—just this small space and no matter what the filing system or how often you clear it out, life, documents, letters, requests, invitations, invoices just keep going back in. I am not able to write regularly. I have never been able to do that—mostly because I have always had a nine-to-five job. I had to write either in between those hours, hurriedly, or spend a lot of weekend and predawn time.

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INTERVIEWER

Could you write after work?

MORRISON

That was difficult. I've tried to overcome not having orderly spaces by substituting compulsion for discipline, so that when something is urgently there, urgently seen or understood, or the metaphor was powerful enough, then I would move everything aside and write for sustained periods of time. I'm talking to you about getting the first draft.

INTERVIEWER

You have to do it straight through?

MORRISON

I do. I don't think it's a law.

INTERVIEWER

Could you write on the bottom of a shoe while riding on a train like Robert Frost? Could you write on an airplane?

MORRISON

Sometimes something that I was having some trouble with falls into place, a word sequence, say, so I've written on scraps of paper, in hotels on hotel stationery, in automobiles. *If* it arrives you *know*. If you know it *really* has come then you *have* to put it down.

INTERVIEWER

What is the physical act of writing like for you?

MORRISON

I write with a pencil.

INTERVIEWER

Would you ever work on a word processor?

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MORRISON

Oh I do that also, but that is much later when everything is put together. I type that into a computer, and then I begin to revise. But everything I write for the first time is written with a pencil, maybe a ball point if I don't have a pencil. I'm not picky, but my preference is for yellow legal pads and a nice number two pencil.

INTERVIEWER

Dixon Ticonderoga number two soft?

MORRISON

Exactly. I remember once trying to use a tape recorder, but it doesn't work.

INTERVIEWER

Did you actually dictate a story into the machine?

MORRISON

Not the whole thing, but just a bit. For instance, when two or three sentences seemed to fall into place, I thought I would carry a tape recorder in the car, particularly when I was working at Random House going back and forth every day. It occurred to me that I could just record it. It was a disaster. I don't trust my writing that is not written, although I work very hard in subsequent revisions to remove the writerliness from it, to give it a combination of lyrical, standard and colloquial language. To pull all these things together into something that I think is much more alive, and representative. But I don't trust something that occurs to me, and then is spoken and transferred immediately to the page.

INTERVIEWER

Do you ever read your work out loud while you are working on it?

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MORRISON

Not until it's published. I don't trust a performance. I could get a response that might make me think it was successful when it wasn't at all. The difficulty for me in writing—*among* the difficulties—is to write language that can work quietly on a page for a reader who doesn't hear anything. Now for that, one has to work very carefully with what is *in between* the words. What is not said. Which is measure, which is rhythm and so on. So, it is what you don't write that frequently gives what you do write its power.

INTERVIEWER

How many times would you say you have to write a paragraph over to reach this standard?

MORRISON

Well, those that need reworking I do as long as I can. I mean I've revised six times, seven times, thirteen times. But there's a line between revision and fretting, just working it to death. It is important to know when you are fretting it; when you are fretting it because it is not working, it needs to be scrapped.

INTERVIEWER

Do you ever go back over what has been published and wish you had fretted more over something?

MORRISON

A lot. Everything.

INTERVIEWER

Do you ever rework passages that have already been published before reading them to an audience?

MORRISON

I don't change it for the audience, but I know what it ought to be and isn't. After twenty some years you can figure it out;

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I know more about it now than I did then. It is not so much that it would have been different or even better; it is just that, taken into context with what I was trying to effect, or what consequence I wanted it to have on the reader, years later the picture is clearer to me.

INTERVIEWER

How do you think being an editor for twenty years affected you as a writer?

MORRISON

I am not sure. It lessened my awe of the publishing industry. I understood the adversarial relationship that sometimes exists between writers and publishers, but I learned how important, how critical an editor was, which I don't think I would have known before.

INTERVIEWER

Are there editors who are helpful critically?

MORRISON

Oh yes. The good ones make all the difference. It is like a priest or a psychiatrist; if you get the wrong one then you are better off alone. But there are editors so rare and so important that they are worth searching for, and you always know when you have one.

INTERVIEWER

Who was the most instrumental editor you've ever worked with?

MORRISON

I had a very good editor, superlative for me—Bob Gottlieb. What made him good for me was a number of things: knowing what not to touch; asking all the questions you probably would have asked yourself had there been the time. Good editors are really the third eye. Cool. Dispassionate. They don't love

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you or your work; for me that is what is valuable—not compliments. Sometimes it's uncanny: the editor puts his or her finger on exactly the place the writer knows is weak but just couldn't do any better at the time. Or perhaps the writer thought it might fly, but wasn't sure. Good editors identify that place, and sometimes make suggestions. Some suggestions are not useful because you can't explain everything to an editor about what you are trying to do. I couldn't possibly explain all of those things to an editor, because what I do has to work on so many levels. But within the relationship if there is some trust, some willingness to listen, remarkable things can happen. I read books all the time that I know would have profited from, not a copy editor, but somebody just talking through it. And it is important to get a great editor at a certain time, because if you don't have one in the beginning, you almost can't have one later. If you work well without an editor, and your books are well received for five or ten years, and then you write another one, which is successful but not very good, why should you then listen to an editor?

INTERVIEWER

You have told students that they should think of the process of revision as one of the major satisfactions of writing. Do you get more pleasure out of writing the first draft, or in the actual revision of the work?

MORRISON

They are different. I am profoundly excited by thinking up or having the idea in the first place . . . before I begin to write.

INTERVIEWER

Does it come in a flash?

MORRISON

No, it's a sustained thing I have to play with. I always start out with an idea, even a boring idea, that becomes a question

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I don't have any answers to. Specifically, since I began the *Beloved* trilogy, the last part of which I'm working on now, I have been wondering why women who are twenty, thirty years younger than I am, are no happier than women who are my age and older. What on earth is that about, when there are so many more things that they can do, so many more choices? *All right*, so this is an embarrassment of riches, but so what. Why is everybody so miserable?

INTERVIEWER

Do you write to figure out exactly how you feel about a subject?

MORRISON

No, I know how I *feel*. My feelings are the result of prejudices and convictions like everybody else's. But I am interested in the complexity, the vulnerability of an idea. It is not: "This is what I believe," because that would not be a book, just a tract. A book is: "This may be what I believe, but suppose I am wrong . . . what could it be?" Or, "I don't know what it is, but I am interested in finding out what it might mean to me, as well as to other people."

INTERVIEWER

Did you know as a child you wanted to be a writer?

MORRISON

No. I wanted to be a reader. I thought everything that needed to be written had already been written or would be. I only wrote the first book because I thought it wasn't there, and I wanted to read it when I got through. I am a pretty good reader. I love it. It is what I do, really. So, if I can read it, that is the highest compliment I can think of. People say, "I write for myself," and it sounds so awful and so narcissistic, but in a sense if you know how to read your own work—that is, with the necessary critical distance—it makes you a better writer and editor. When I teach creative writing, I always speak

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about how you have to learn how to read your work; I don't mean enjoy it because you wrote it. I mean, go away from it, and read it as though it is the first time you've ever seen it. Critique it that way. Don't get all involved in your thrilling sentences and all that . . .

INTERVIEWER

Do you have your audience in mind when you sit down to write?

MORRISON

Only me. If I come to a place where I am unsure, I have the characters to go to for reassurance. By that time they are friendly enough to tell me if the rendition of their lives is authentic or not. But there are so many things only I can tell. After all, this is my work. I have to take full responsibility for doing it right as well as doing it wrong. Doing it wrong isn't bad, but doing it wrong and thinking you've done it right is. I remember spending a whole summer writing something I was very impressed with, but couldn't get back to until winter. I went back confident that those fifty pages were really first-rate, but when I read them, each page of the fifty was terrible. It was really ill-conceived. I knew that I could do it over, but I just couldn't get over the fact that I thought it was so good at the time. And that is scary because then you think it means you don't know.

INTERVIEWER

What about it was so bad?

MORRISON

It was pompous. Pompous and unappetizing.

INTERVIEWER

I read that you started writing after your divorce as a way of beating back the loneliness. Was that true, and do you write for different reasons now?

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MORRISON

Sort of. Sounds simpler than it was. I don't know if I was writing for that reason or some other reason, or one that I don't even suspect. I do know that I don't like it here if I don't have something to write.

INTERVIEWER

Here, meaning where?

MORRISON

Meaning out in the world. It is not possible for me to be unaware of the incredible violence, the willful ignorance, the hunger for other people's pain. I'm always conscious of that though I am less aware of it under certain circumstances—good friends at dinner, other books. Teaching makes a big difference, but that is not enough. Teaching could make me into someone who is complacent, unaware, rather than part of the solution. So what makes me feel as though I belong here, out in this world, is not the teacher, not the mother, not the lover but what goes on in my mind when I am writing. Then I belong here, and then all of the things that are disparate and irreconcilable can be useful. I can do the traditional things that writers always say they do, which is to make order out of chaos. Even if you are reproducing the disorder, you are sovereign at that point. Struggling through the work is extremely important—more important to me than publishing it.

INTERVIEWER

If you didn't do this. Then the chaos would . . .

MORRISON

Then I would be part of the chaos.

INTERVIEWER

Wouldn't the answer to that be either to lecture about the chaos or to be in politics?

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MORRISON

If I had a gift for it. All I can do is read books and write books, and edit books and critique books. I don't think that I could show up on a regular basis as a politician. I would lose interest. I don't have the resources for it, the gift. There are people who can organize other people, and I cannot. I'd just get bored.

INTERVIEWER

When did it become clear to you that your gift was to be a writer?

MORRISON

It was very late. I always thought I was probably adept, because people used to say so, but their criteria might not have been mine. So, I wasn't interested in what they said. It meant nothing. It was by the time I was writing *Song of Solomon*, the third book, that I began to think that this was the central part of my life. Not to say that other women haven't said it all along, but for a woman to say, "I am a writer" is difficult.

INTERVIEWER

Why?

MORRISON

Well, it isn't so difficult *anymore*, but it certainly was for me, and for women of my generation or my class or my race. I don't know that all those things are folded into it, but the point is you're moving yourself out of the gender role. You are not saying, "I am a mother, I am a wife." Or, if you're in the labor market, "I am a teacher, I am an editor." But when you move to "writer" what is that supposed to mean? Is that a job? Is this the way you make your living? It's an intervention into terrain that you are not familiar with—where you have no provenance. At the time I certainly didn't personally know any other women writers who were successful; it

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looked very much like a male preserve. So you sort of hope you're going to be a little minor person around the edges. It's almost as if you needed permission to write. When I read women's biographies and autobiographies, even accounts of how they got started writing, almost every one of them had a little anecdote which told about the moment someone gave them permission to do it. A mother, a husband, a teacher . . . somebody said, "Okay, go ahead—you can do it." Which is not to say that men have never needed that; frequently when they are very young, a mentor says, "You're good," and they take off. The entitlement was something they could take for granted. I couldn't. It was all very strange. So, even though I knew that writing was central to my life, that it was where my mind was, where I was most delighted and most challenged, I couldn't say it. If someone asked me, "What do you do?" I wouldn't say, "Oh I'm a writer." I'd say, "I'm an editor, or a teacher." Because when you meet people and go to lunch, if they say "What do you do?" and you say, "I'm a writer," they have to think about that, and then they ask, "What have you written?" Then they have to either like it, or not like it. People feel obliged to like or not like and say so. It is perfectly all right to hate my work. It really is. I have close friends whose work I loathe.

INTERVIEWER

Did you feel you had to write in private?

MORRISON

Oh yes, I wanted to make it a private thing. I wanted to own it myself. Because once you say it, then other people become involved. As a matter of fact, while I was at Random House I never said I was a writer.

INTERVIEWER

Why not?

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MORRISON

Oh, it would have been awful. First of all they didn't hire me to do that. They didn't hire me to be one of *them*. Secondly, I think they would have fired me.

INTERVIEWER

Really?

MORRISON

Sure. There were no in-house editors who wrote fiction. Ed Doctorow quit. There was nobody else—no real buying, negotiating editor in trade who was also publishing her own novels.

INTERVIEWER

Did the fact that you were a woman have anything to do with it?

MORRISON

That I didn't think about too much. I was so busy. I only know that I will never again trust my life, my future, to the whims of men, in companies or out. Never again will their judgement have anything to do with what I think I can do. That was the wonderful liberation of being divorced and having children. I did not mind failure, ever, but I minded thinking that someone male knew better. Before that, all the men I knew *did* know better, they really did. My father, and teachers were smart people who knew better. Then I came across a smart person who was very important to me who *didn't* know better.

INTERVIEWER

Was this your husband?

MORRISON

Yes. He knew better about his life, but not about mine. I had to stop and say, let me start again and see what it is

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like to be a grown-up. I decided to leave home, to take my children with me, to go into publishing and see what I could do. I was prepared for that not to work either, but I wanted to see what it was like to be a grown-up.

INTERVIEWER

Can you talk about that moment at Random House when they suddenly realized that they had a writer in their midst?

MORRISON

I published a book called *The Bluest Eye*. I didn't tell them about it. They didn't know until they read the review in the *New York Times*. It was published by Holt. Somebody had told this young guy there that I was writing something, and he had said in a very offhand way, if you ever complete something send it to me. So I did. A lot of black men were writing in 1968, 1969, and he bought it, thinking that there was a growing interest in what black people were writing, and that this book of mine would also sell. He was wrong. What was selling was, "Let me tell you how powerful I am and how horrible you are," or some version of that. For whatever reasons, he took a small risk. He didn't pay me much, so it didn't matter if the book sold or not. It got a really horrible review in the *New York Times Book Review* on Sunday and then got a very good daily review.

INTERVIEWER

You mentioned getting permission to write. Who gave it to you?

MORRISON

No one. What I needed permission to do was to succeed at it. I never signed a contract until the book was finished because I didn't want it to be homework. A contract meant somebody was waiting for it, that I *had* to do it, and they could ask me about it. They could get up in my face, and I don't like that. By not signing a contract, I do it, and if I want

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you to see it, I'll let you see it. It has to do with self-esteem. I am sure for years you have heard writers constructing illusions of freedom, anything in order to have the illusion that it is all mine, and only I can do it. I remember introducing Eudora Welty and saying that nobody could have written those stories but her, meaning that I have a feeling about most books that at some point somebody would have written them *anyway*. But then there are some writers without whom certain stories would never have been written. I don't mean the subject matter or the narrative but just the way in which they did it—their slant on it is truly unique.

INTERVIEWER

Who are some of them?

MORRISON

Hemingway is in that category, Flannery O'Connor. Faulkner, Fitzgerald . . .

INTERVIEWER

Haven't you been critical of the way these authors depicted blacks?

MORRISON

No! Me, critical? I have been revealing how white writers imagine black people, and some of them are brilliant at it. Faulkner was brilliant at it. Hemingway did it poorly in places and brilliantly elsewhere.

INTERVIEWER

How so?

MORRISON

In not using black characters, but using the aesthetic of blacks as anarchy, as sexual license, as deviance. In his last book, *The Garden of Eden*, Hemingway's heroine is getting blacker and blacker. The woman who is going mad tells her

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husband, "I want to be your little African Queen." The novel gets its charge that way: "Her white white hair and her black, black skin" . . . almost like a Man Ray photograph. Mark Twain talked about racial ideology in the most powerful, eloquent and instructive way I have ever read. Edgar Allan Poe did not. He loved white supremacy and the planter class, and he wanted to be a gentleman, and he endorsed all of that. He didn't contest it, or critique it. What is exciting about American literature is that business of how writers say things under, beneath and around their stories. Think of *Pudd'nhead Wilson* and all these inversions of what race is, how sometimes nobody can tell, or the thrill of discovery? Faulkner in *Absalom, Absalom!* spends the entire book tracing race, and you can't find it. No one can see it, even the character who *is* black can't see it. I did this lecture for my students that took me forever, which was tracking all the moments of withheld, partial or disinformation, when a racial fact or clue *sort* of comes out but doesn't quite arrive. I just wanted to chart it. I listed its appearance, disguise and disappearance on every page, I mean every phrase! Everything, and I delivered this thing to my class. They all fell asleep! But I was so fascinated, technically. Do you know how hard it is to withhold that kind of information but hinting, pointing all of the time? And then to reveal it in order to say that it is *not* the point anyway? It is technically just astonishing. As a reader you have been forced to hunt for a drop of black blood that means everything and nothing. The insanity of racism. So the structure is the argument. Not what this one says, or that one says . . . it is the *structure* of the book, and you are there hunting this black thing that is nowhere to be found, and yet makes all the difference. No one has done anything quite like that ever. So, when I critique, what I am saying is, I don't care if Faulkner is a racist or not; I don't personally care, but I am fascinated by what it means to write like this.

INTERVIEWER

What about black writers . . . how do they write in a world dominated by and informed by their relationship to a white culture?

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MORRISON

By trying to alter language, simply to free it up, not to repress it or confine it, but to open it up. Tease it. Blast its racist straitjacket. I wrote a story entitled "Recitatif," in which there are two little girls in an orphanage, one white and one black. But the reader doesn't know which is white and which is black. I use class codes, but no racial codes.

INTERVIEWER

Is this meant to confuse the reader?

MORRISON

Well, yes. But to provoke and enlighten. I did that as a lark. What was exciting was to be forced as a writer not to be lazy and rely on obvious codes. Soon as I say, "Black woman . . ." I can rest on or provoke predictable responses, but if I leave it out then I have to talk about her in a complicated way—as a person.

INTERVIEWER

Why wouldn't you want to say, "The black woman came out of the store"?

MORRISON

Well, you can, but it has to be important that she is black.

INTERVIEWER

What about *The Confessions of Nat Turner*?

MORRISON

Well, here we have a very self-conscious character who says things like, "I looked at my black hand." Or "I woke up and I felt black." It is very much on Bill Styron's mind. He feels charged in Nat Turner's skin . . . in this place that feels exotic to him. So it reads exotically to us, that's all.

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INTERVIEWER

There was a tremendous outcry at that time from people who felt that Styron didn't have a right to write about Nat Turner.

MORRISON

He has a right to write about whatever he wants. To suggest otherwise is outrageous. What they should have criticized, and some of them did, was Styron's suggestion that Nat Turner hated black people. In the book Turner expresses his revulsion over and over again . . . he's so distant from blacks, so superior. So the fundamental question is why would anybody follow him? What kind of leader is this who has a fundamentally racist contempt that seems unreal to any black person reading it. Any white leader would have some interest and identification with the people he was asking to die. That was what these critics meant when they said Nat Turner speaks like a white man. That racial distance is strong and clear in that book.

INTERVIEWER

You must have read a lot of slave narratives for *Beloved*.

MORRISON

I wouldn't read them for information because I knew that they had to be authenticated by white patrons, that they couldn't say everything they wanted to say because they couldn't alienate their audience; they had to be quiet about certain things. They were going to be as good as they could be under the circumstances and as revelatory, but they never say how terrible it was. They would just say, "Well, you know, it was really awful, but let's abolish slavery so life can go on." Their narratives had to be very understated. So while I looked at the documents and felt *familiar* with slavery and overwhelmed by it, I wanted it to be truly *felt*. I wanted to translate the historical into the personal. I spent a long time trying to figure out what it was about slavery that made it so repugnant, so personal, so indifferent, so intimate and yet so public.

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In reading some of the documents I noticed frequent references to something that was never properly described—*the bit*. This thing was put into the mouth of slaves to punish them and shut them up without preventing them from working. I spent a long time trying to find out what it looked like. I kept reading statements like, "I put the bit on Jenny," or, as Equiano says, "I went into a kitchen" and I saw a woman standing at the stove, and she had a brake, (b-r-a-k-e, he spells it) "in her mouth," and I said, "What is that?" and somebody told me what it was, and then I said, "I never saw anything so awful in all my life." But I really couldn't image the thing—did it look like a horse's bit or what?

Eventually I did find some sketches in one book in this country, which was the record of a man's torture of his wife. In South America, Brazil, places like that, they kept such mementos. But while I was searching, something else occurred to me, namely that this bit, this item, this personalized type of torture, was a direct descendant of the inquisition. And I realized that of course you can't buy this stuff. You can't send away for a mail-order bit for your slave. Sears doesn't carry them. So you have to make it. You have to go out in the backyard and put some stuff together and construct it and then affix it to a person. So the whole process had a very personal quality for the person who made it, as well as for the person who wore it. Then I realized that describing it would never be helpful: that the reader didn't need to *see* it so much as *feel* what it was like. I realized that it was important to imagine the bit as an active instrument, rather than simply as a curio or an historical fact. And in the same way I wanted to show the reader what slavery *felt* like, rather than how it looked.

There's a passage in which Paul D. says to Sethe, "I've never told anybody about it, I've sung about it sometimes." He tries to tell her what wearing the bit was like, but he ends up talking about a rooster that he swears smiled at him when he wore it—he felt cheapened and lessened and that he would never be worth as much as a rooster sitting on a tub in the sunlight.

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I make other references to the desire to spit, to sucking iron and so on; but it seemed to me that describing what it *looked* like would distract the reader from what I wanted him or her to experience, which was what it *felt* like. The kind of information you can find between the lines of history. It sort of falls off the page, or it's a glance and a reference. It's right there in the intersection where an institution becomes personal, where the historical becomes people with names.

INTERVIEWER

When you create a character is it completely created out of your own imagination?

MORRISON

I never use anyone I know. In *The Bluest Eye* I think I used some gestures and dialogue of my mother in certain places, and a little geography. I've never done that since. I really am very conscientious about that. It's never based on anyone. I don't do what many writers do.

INTERVIEWER

Why is that?

MORRISON

There is this feeling that artists have—photographers more than other people, and writers—that they are acting like a succubus . . . this process of taking from something that's alive and using it for one's own purposes. You can do it with trees, butterflies or human beings. Making a little life for oneself by scavenging other people's lives is a big question, and it does have moral and ethical implications.

In fiction, I feel the most intelligent, and the most free, and the most excited, when my characters are fully invented people. That's part of the excitement. If they're based on somebody else, in a funny way it's an infringement of a copyright. That person *owns* his life, has a patent on it. It shouldn't be available for fiction.

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INTERVIEWER

Do you ever feel like your characters are getting away from you, out of your control?

MORRISON

I take control of them. They are very carefully imagined. I feel as though I know all there is to know about them, even things I don't write—like how they part their hair. They are like ghosts. They have nothing on their minds but themselves and aren't interested in anything but themselves. So you can't let them write your book for you. I have read books in which I know that has happened—when a novelist has been totally taken over by a character. I want to say, "You can't do that. If those people could write books they would, but they can't. *You* can." So, you have to say, "Shut up. Leave me alone. I am doing this."

INTERVIEWER

Have you ever had to tell any of your characters to shut up?

MORRISON

Pilate, I did. Therefore she doesn't speak very much. She has this long conversation with the two boys, and every now and then she'll say something, but she doesn't have the dialogue the other people have. I had to do that, otherwise she was going to overwhelm everybody. She got terribly interesting; characters can do that for a little bit. I had to take it back. It's *my* book; it's not called *Pilate*.

INTERVIEWER

Pilate is such a strong character. It seems to me that the women in your books are almost always stronger and braver than the men. Why is that?

MORRISON

That isn't true, but I hear that a lot. I think that our expectations of women are very low. If women just stand up straight

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for thirty days, everybody goes, "Oh! How brave!" As a matter of fact, somebody wrote about Sethe, and said she was this powerful, statuesque woman who wasn't even human. But at the end of the book, she can barely turn her head. She has been zonked; she can't even feed herself. Is that tough?

INTERVIEWER

Maybe people read it that way because they thought Sethe made such a hard choice slashing Beloved's throat. Maybe they think that's being strong. Some would say that's just bad manners.

MORRISON

Well, Beloved surely didn't think it was all that tough. She thought it was lunacy. Or, more importantly, "How do you know death is better for me? You've never died. How could you know?" But I think Paul D., Son, Stamp Paid, even Guitar, make equally difficult choices; they are principled. I do think we are too accustomed to women who don't talk back or who use the weapons of the weak.

INTERVIEWER

What are the weapons of the weak?

MORRISON

Nagging. Poison. Gossip. Sneaking around instead of confrontation.

INTERVIEWER

There have been so few novels about women who have intense friendships with other women. Why do you think that is?

MORRISON

It has been a discredited relationship. When I was writing *Sula*, I was under the impression that for a large part of the female population a woman friend was considered a secondary relationship. A man and a woman's relationship was primary.

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Women, your own friends, were always secondary relationships when the man was not there. Because of this, there's that whole cadre of women who don't like women and prefer men. We had to be taught to like one another. *Ms.* magazine was founded on the premise that we really have to stop complaining about one another, hating, fighting one another and joining men in their condemnation of ourselves—a typical example of what dominated people do. That is a big education. When much of the literature was like that—when you read about women together (not lesbians, or those who have formed long relationships that are covertly lesbian, like in Virginia Woolf's work), it is an overtly male view of females together. They are usually male dominated—like some of Henry James's characters—or the women are talking about men, like Jane Austen's girlfriends . . . talking about who got married and how to get married, and are you going to lose him, and I think she wants him and so on. To have heterosexual women who are friends, who are talking only about themselves to each other, seemed to me a very radical thing when *Sula* was published in 1971 . . . but it is hardly radical now.

INTERVIEWER

It is becoming acceptable.

MORRISON

Yes, and it's going to get boring. It will be overdone, and as usual it will all run amok.

INTERVIEWER

Why do writers have such a hard time writing about sex?

MORRISON

Sex is difficult to write about because it's just not sexy enough. The only way to write about it is not to write much. Let the reader bring his own sexuality into the text. A writer I usually admire has written about sex in the most off-putting way. There is just too much information. If you start saying

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"the curve of . . ." you soon sound like a gynecologist. Only Joyce could get away with that. He said all those forbidden words. He said *cunt*, and that was shocking. The forbidden word can be provocative. But after a while it becomes monotonous rather than arousing. Less is always better. Some writers think that if they use dirty words they've done it. It can work for a short period and for a very young imagination, but after a while it doesn't deliver. When Sethe and Paul D. first see each other, in about half a page they get the sex out of the way, which isn't any good anyway—it's fast, and they're embarrassed about it—and then they're lying there trying to pretend they're not in that bed, that they haven't met, and then they begin to think different thoughts, which begin to merge so you can't tell who's thinking what. That merging to me is more tactically sensual than if I had tried to describe body parts.

INTERVIEWER

What about plot? Do you always know where you're going? Would you write the end before you got there?

MORRISON

When I really know what it is about, then I can write that end scene. I wrote the end of *Beloved* about a quarter of the way in. I wrote the end of *Jazz* very early and the end of *Song of Solomon* very early on. What I really want is for the plot to be *how* it happened. It is like a detective story in a sense. You know who is dead and you want to find out who did it. So, you put the salient elements up front, and the reader is hooked into wanting to know, How did that happen? Who did that and why? You are forced into having a certain kind of language that will keep the reader asking those questions. In *Jazz*, just as I did before with *The Bluest Eye*, I put the whole plot on the first page. In fact, in the first edition the plot was on the cover, so that a person in a bookstore could read the cover and know right away what the book was about, and could, if they wished, dismiss it and buy another book.

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This seemed a suitable technique for *Jazz* because I thought of the plot in that novel—the threesome—as the melody of the piece, and it is fine to follow a melody—to feel the satisfaction of recognizing a melody whenever the narrator returns to it. That was the real art of the enterprise for me: bumping up against that melody time and again, seeing it from another point of view, seeing it afresh each time, playing it back and forth.

When Keith Jarrett plays "Ol' Man River," the delight and satisfaction is not so much in the melody itself but in recognizing it when it surfaces and when it is hidden and when it goes away completely, what is put in its place. Not so much in the original line as in all the echoes and shades and turns and pivots Jarrett plays around it. I was trying to do something similar with the plot in *Jazz*. I wanted the story to be the vehicle which moved us from page one to the end, but I wanted the delight to be found in moving away from the story and coming back to it, looking around it, and through it, as though it were a prism, constantly turning.

This playful aspect of *Jazz* may well cause a great deal of dissatisfaction in readers who just want the melody, who want to know what happened, who did it and why. But the jazz-like structure wasn't a secondary thing for me—it was the raison d'être of the book. The process of trial and error by which the narrator revealed the plot was as important and exciting to me as telling the story.

INTERVIEWER

You also divulge the plot early on in *Beloved*.

MORRISON

It seemed important to me that the action in *Beloved*—the fact of infanticide—be immediately known, but deferred, unseen. I wanted to give the reader all the information and the consequences surrounding the act, while avoiding engorging myself or the reader with the violence itself. I remember writing the sentence where Sethe cuts the throat of the child very,

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very late in the process of writing the book. I remember getting up from the table and walking outside for a long time—walking around the yard and coming back and revising it a little bit and going back out and in and rewriting the sentence over and over again . . . each time I fixed that sentence so that it was exactly right, or so I thought, but then I would be unable to sit there and would have to go away and come back. I thought that the act itself had to be not only buried but also understated, because if the language was going to compete with the violence itself it would be obscene or pornographic.

INTERVIEWER

Style is obviously very important to you. Can you talk about this in relation to *Jazz*?

MORRISON

With *Jazz*, I wanted to convey the sense that a musician conveys—that he has more but he's not gonna give it to you. It's an exercise in restraint, a holding back—not because it's not there, or because one had exhausted it, but because of the riches, and because it can be done again. That sense of knowing when to stop is a learned thing, and I didn't always have it. It was probably not until after I wrote *Song of Solomon* that I got to feeling secure enough to experience what it meant to be thrifty with images and language and so on. I was very conscious in writing *Jazz* of trying to blend that which is contrived and artificial with improvisation. I thought of myself as like the jazz musician: someone who practices and practices and practices in order to be able to invent and to make his art look effortless and graceful. I was always conscious of the constructed aspect of the writing process, and that art appears natural and elegant only as a result of constant practice and awareness of its formal structures. You must practice thrift in order to achieve that luxurious quality of wastefulness—that sense that you have enough to waste, that you are holding back—without actually wasting anything. You shouldn't overgratify, you should never satiate. I've always felt that that

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peculiar sense of hunger at the end of a piece of art—a yearning for more—is really very, very powerful. But there is at the same time a kind of contentment, knowing that at some other time there will indeed be more because the artist is endlessly inventive.

INTERVIEWER

Were there other . . . ingredients, structural entities?

MORRISON

Well, it seems to me that migration was a major event in the cultural history of this country. Now I'm being very speculative about all of this—I guess that's why I write novels—but it seems to me something modern and new happened after the Civil War. Of course, a number of things changed, but the era was most clearly marked by the disowning and dispossession of ex-slaves. These ex-slaves were sometimes taken into their local labor markets, but they often tried to escape their problems by migrating to the city. I was fascinated by the thought of what the city must have meant to them, these second and third generation ex-slaves, to rural people living there in their own number. The city must have seemed so exciting and wonderful, so much the place to be.

I was interested in how the city worked. How classes and groups and nationalities had the security of numbers within their own turfs and territories, but also felt the thrill of knowing that there were other turfs and other territories, and felt the real glamor and excitement of being in this throng. I was interested in how music changed in this country. Spirituals and gospel and blues represented one kind of response to slavery—they gave voice to the yearning for escape, in code, literally on the underground railroad.

I was also concerned with personal life. How did people love one another? What did they think was free? At that time, when the ex-slaves were moving into the city, running away from something that was constricting and killing them and dispossessing them over and over and over again, they were

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in a very limiting environment. But when you listen to their music—the beginnings of jazz—you realized that they are talking about something else. They are talking about love, about loss. But there is such grandeur, such satisfaction in those lyrics . . . they're never happy—somebody's always leaving—but they're not whining. It's as though the whole tragedy of choosing somebody, risking love, risking emotion, risking sensuality, and then losing it all didn't matter, since it was their choice. Exercising choice in who you love was a major, major thing. And the music reinforced the idea of love as a space where one could negotiate freedom.

Obviously, jazz was considered—as all new music is—to be devil music; too sensual and provocative, and so on. But for some black people jazz meant claiming their own bodies. You can image what that must have meant for people whose bodies had been owned, who had been slaves as children, or who remembered their parents being slaves. Blues and jazz represented ownership of one's own emotions. So of course it is excessive and overdone: tragedy in jazz is relished, almost as though a happy ending would take away some of its glamour, its flair. Now advertisers use jazz on television to communicate authenticity and modernity; to say "trust me," and to say "hip."

These days the city still retains the quality of excitement it had in the jazz age, only now we associate that excitement with a different kind of danger. We chant and scream and act alarmed about the homeless; we say we want our streets back, but it is from our awareness of homelessness and our employment of strategies to deal with it that we get our sense of the urban. Feeling as though we have the armor, the shields, the moxie, the strength, the toughness and the smarts to be engaged and survive encounters with the unpredictable, the alien, the strange and the violent is an intrinsic part of what it means to live in the city. When people "complain" about homelessness they are actually bragging about it: "New York has more homeless than San Francisco"—"No, no, no, San Francisco has more homeless"—"No, you haven't been to De-

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troit." We are almost competitive about our endurance, which I think is one of the reasons why we accept homelessness so easily.

INTERVIEWER

So the city freed the ex-slaves from their history?

MORRISON

In part, yes. The city was seductive to them because it promised forgetfulness. It offered the possibility of freedom—freedom, as you put it, from history. But although history should not become a straitjacket, which overwhelms and binds, neither should it be forgotten. One must critique it, test it, confront it and understand it in order to achieve a freedom that is more than license, to achieve true, adult agency. If you penetrate the seduction of the city, then it becomes possible to confront your own history—to forget what ought to be forgotten and use what is useful—such true agency is made possible.

INTERVIEWER

How do visual images influence your work?

MORRISON

I was having some difficulty describing a scene in *Song of Solomon* . . . of a man running away from some obligations and himself. I used an Edvard Munch painting almost literally. He is walking, and there is nobody on his side of the street. Everybody is on the other side.

INTERVIEWER

Song of Solomon is such a painted book in comparison with some of your others like *Beloved*, which is sepia toned.

MORRISON

Part of that has to do with the visual images that I got being aware that in historical terms women, black people in general,

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were very attracted to very bright colored clothing. Most people are frightened by color anyway.

INTERVIEWER

Why?

MORRISON

They just are. In this culture quiet colors are considered elegant. Civilized western people wouldn't buy blood red sheets or dishes. There may be something more to it than what I am suggesting. But the slave population had no access even to what color there was, because they wore slave clothes, hand-me-downs, work clothes made out of burlap and sacking. For them a colored dress would be luxurious; it wouldn't matter whether it was rich or poor cloth . . . just to have a red or a yellow dress. I stripped *Beloved* of color so that there are only the small moments when Sethe runs amok buying ribbons and bows, enjoying herself the way children enjoy that kind of color. The whole business of color was why slavery was able to last such a long time. It wasn't as though you had a class of convicts who could dress themselves up and pass themselves off. No, these were people marked because of their skin color, as well as other features. So color is a signifying mark. Baby Suggs dreams of color, and says, "Bring me a little lavender. . . ." It is a kind of a luxury. We are so inundated with color and visuals. I just wanted to pull it back so that one could feel that hunger and that delight. I couldn't do that if I had made it the painterly book *Song of Solomon* was.

INTERVIEWER

Is that what you are referring to when you speak about needing to find a controlling image?

MORRISON

Sometimes, yes. There are three or four in *Song of Solomon*, I knew that I wanted it to be painterly, and I wanted the opening to be red, white and blue. I also knew that in some

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sense he would have to "fly." In *Song of Solomon* it was the first time that I had written about a man who was the central, the driving engine of the narrative; I was a little unsure about my ability to feel comfortable inside him. I could always look at him and write from the outside, but those would have been just perceptions. I had to be able not only to look at him but to feel how it really must have felt. So in trying to think about this, the image in my mind was a train. All the previous books have been women-centered, and they have been pretty much in the neighborhood and in the yard; this was going to move out. So, I had this feeling about a train . . . sort of revving up, then moving out as he does, and then it sort of highballs at the end; it speeds up, but it doesn't brake, it just highballs and leaves you sort of suspended. So that image controlled the structure for me, although that is not something I articulate or even make reference to; it only matters that it works for me. Other books look like spirals, like *Sula*.

INTERVIEWER

How would you describe the controlling image of *Jazz*?

MORRISON

Jazz was very complicated because I wanted to re-represent two contradictory things—artifice and improvisation, where you have an artwork, planned, thought through, but at the same time appears invented, like jazz. I thought of the image being a book. Physically a book, but at the same time it is writing itself. Imagining itself. Talking. Aware of what it is doing. It watches itself think and imagine. That seemed to me to be a combination of artifice and improvisation—where you practice and plan in order to invent. Also the willingness to fail, to be wrong, because jazz is performance. In a performance you make mistakes, and you don't have the luxury of revision that a writer has; you have to make something out of a mistake, and if you do it well enough it will take you to another place where you never would have gone had you not made that error. So, you have to be able to risk making that

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error in performance. Dancers do it all the time, as well as jazz musicians. *Jazz* predicts its own story. Sometimes it is wrong because of faulty vision. It simply did not imagine those characters well enough, admits it was wrong, and the characters talk back the way jazz musicians do. It has to listen to the characters it has invented, and then learn something from them. It was the most intricate thing I had done, though I wanted to tell a very simple story about people who do not know that they are living in the jazz age, and to never use the word.

INTERVIEWER

One way to achieve this structurally is to have several voices speaking throughout each book. Why do you do this?

MORRISON

It's important not to have a totalizing view. In American literature we have been so totalized—as though there is only one version. We are not one indistinguishable block of people who always behave the same way.

INTERVIEWER

Is that what you mean by "totalized?"

MORRISON

Yes. A definitive or an authoritarian view from somebody else or someone speaking for us. No singularity and no diversity. I try to give some credibility to all sorts of voices each of which is profoundly different. Because what strikes me about African-American culture *is* its variety. In so much of contemporary music everybody sounds alike. But when you think about black music, you think about the difference between Duke Ellington and Sidney Bechet or Satchmo or Miles Davis. They don't sound anything alike, but you know that they are all black performers, because of whatever that quality is that makes you realize, "Oh yes, this is part of something called the African-American music tradition." There is no black woman

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popular singer, jazz singer, blues singer who sounds like any other. Billie Holiday does not sound like Aretha, doesn't sound like Nina, doesn't sound like Sarah, doesn't sound like any of them. They are really powerfully different. And they will tell you that they couldn't possibly have made it as singers if they sounded like somebody else. If someone comes along sounding like Ella Fitzgerald, they will say, "Oh we have one of those . . ." It's interesting to me how those women have this very distinct, unmistakable image. I would like to write like that. I would like to write novels that were unmistakably mine, but nevertheless fit first into African-American traditions and second of all, this whole thing called literature.

INTERVIEWER

First African-American?

MORRISON

Yes.

INTERVIEWER

. . . rather than the whole of literature?

MORRISON

Oh yes.

INTERVIEWER

Why?

MORRISON

It's richer. It has more complex sources. It pulls from something that's closer to the edge, it's much more modern. It has a human future.

INTERVIEWER

Wouldn't you rather be known as a great exponent of literature rather than as an African-American writer?

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MORRISON

It's very important to me that my work be African-American; if it assimilates into a different or larger pool, so much the better. But I shouldn't be *asked* to do that. Joyce is not asked to do that. Tolstoy is not. I mean, they can all be Russian, French, Irish or Catholic, they write out of where they come from, and I do too. It just so happens that that space for me is African-American; it could be Catholic, it could be Midwestern. I'm those things too, and they are all important.

INTERVIEWER

Why do you think people ask, "Why don't you write something that we can understand?" Do you threaten them by not writing in the typical western, linear, chronological way?

MORRISON

I don't think that they mean that. I think they mean, "Are you ever going to write a book about white people?" For them perhaps that's a kind of a compliment. They're saying, "You write well enough, I would even let you write about me." They couldn't say that to anybody else. I mean, could I have gone up to André Gide and said, "Yes, but when are you going to get serious and start writing about black people?" I don't think he would know how to answer that question. Just as I don't. He would say, "What?" "I will if I want" or "Who are you?" What is behind that question is, there's the center, which is white, and then there are these regional blacks or Asians, or any sort of marginal people. That question can only be asked from the center. Bill Moyers asked me that when-are-you-going-to-write-about question on television. I just said, "Well, maybe one day . . ." but I couldn't say to him, you know, you can only ask that question from the center. The center of the world! I mean he's a white male. He's asking a marginal person, "When are you going to get to the center? When are you going to write about white people?" I can't say, "Bill, why are you asking me that question?" or "As long

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as that question seems reasonable is as long as I won't, can't." The point is that he's patronizing; he's saying, "You write well enough. You could come on into the center if you wanted to. You don't have to stay out there on the margins." And I'm saying, "Yeah, well I'm gonna stay out here on the margin, and let the center look for me."

Maybe it's a false claim, but not fully. I'm sure it was true for the ones we think of as giants now. Joyce is a good example. He moved here and there, but he wrote about Ireland wherever he was, didn't care where he was. I am sure people said to him, "Why . . .?" Maybe the French asked, "When you gonna write about Paris?"

INTERVIEWER

What do you appreciate most in Joyce?

MORRISON

It is amazing how certain kinds of irony and humor travel. Sometimes Joyce is hilarious. I read *Finnegans Wake* after graduate school, and I had the great good fortune of reading it without any help. I don't know if I read it right, but it was hilarious! I laughed constantly! I didn't know what was going on for whole blocks but it didn't matter because I wasn't going to be graded on it. I think the reason why everyone still has so much fun with Shakespeare is because he didn't have any literary critic. He was just doing it; and there were no reviews except for people throwing stuff on stage. He could just do it.

INTERVIEWER

Do you think if he had been reviewed he would have worked less?

MORRISON

Oh, if he'd cared about it, he'd have been very self-conscious. That's a hard attitude to maintain, to pretend you don't care, pretend you don't read.

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INTERVIEWER

Do you read your reviews?

MORRISON

I read everything.

INTERVIEWER

Really? You look deadly serious.

MORRISON

I read everything written about me that I see.

INTERVIEWER

Why is that?

MORRISON

I have to know what's going on!

INTERVIEWER

You want to see how you're coming across?

MORRISON

No, no. It's not about me or my work, it's about what is going on. I have to get a sense, particularly of what's going on with women's work, or African-American work, contemporary work. I teach a literature course. So I read any information that's going to help me teach.

INTERVIEWER

Are you ever really surprised when they compare you to the magic realists, such as Gabriel García Márquez?

MORRISON

Yes, I used to be. It doesn't mean anything to me. Schools are only important to me when I'm teaching literature. It

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doesn't mean anything to me when I'm sitting here with a big pile of blank yellow paper . . . what do I say? I'm a magic realist? Each subject matter demands its own form, you know.

INTERVIEWER

Why do you teach undergraduates?

MORRISON

Here at Princeton, they really do value undergraduates, which is nice because a lot of universities value only the graduate school or the professional research schools. I like Princeton's notion. I would have loved that for my own children. I don't like freshman and sophomores being treated as the staging ground or the playground or the canvas on which graduate students learn how to teach. They need the best instruction. I've always thought the public schools needed to study the best literature. I always taught *Oedipus Rex* to all kinds of what they used to call remedial or development classes. The reason those kids are in those classes is that they're bored to death; so you can't give them boring things. You have to give them the best there is to engage them.

INTERVIEWER

One of your sons is a musician. Were you ever musical, did you ever play the piano?

MORRISON

No, but I come from a family of highly skilled musicians. Highly skilled, meaning most of them couldn't read music but they could play everything that they heard . . . instantly. They sent us, my sister and me, to music lessons. They were sending me off to learn how to do something that they could do naturally. I thought I was deficient, retarded. They didn't explain that perhaps it's more important that you learn how to *read* music . . . that it's a good thing, not a bad thing. I thought we were sort of lame people going off to learn how

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to walk, while, you know they all just stood up and did it naturally.

INTERVIEWER

Do you think there is an education for becoming a writer? Reading perhaps?

MORRISON

That has only limited value.

INTERVIEWER

Travel the world? Take courses in sociology, history?

MORRISON

Or stay home . . . I don't think they have to go anywhere.

INTERVIEWER

Some people say, "Oh I can't write a book until I've lived my life, until I've had experiences."

MORRISON

That may be—maybe they can't. But look at the people who never went anywhere and just thought it up. Thomas Mann. I guess he took a few little trips. . . . I think you either have or you acquire this sort of imagination. Sometimes you do need a stimulus. But I myself don't ever go anywhere for stimulation. I don't want to go anywhere. If I could just sit in one spot I would be happy. I don't trust the ones who say I have to go do something before I can write. You see, I don't write autobiographically. First of all, I'm not interested in real-life people as subjects for fiction—including myself. If I write about somebody who's an historical figure like Margaret Garner, I really don't know anything about her. What I knew came from reading two interviews with her. They said, Isn't this extraordinary. Here's a woman who escaped into Cincinnati from the horrors of slavery and was not crazy. Though she'd killed her child, she was not foaming at the mouth. She

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was very calm, she said, "I'd do it again." That was more than enough to fire my imagination.

INTERVIEWER

She was sort of a *cause célèbre?*

MORRISON

She was. Her real life was much more awful than it's rendered in the novel, but if I had known all there was to know about her I never would have written it. It would have been finished, there would have been no place in there for me. It would be like a recipe already cooked. There you are. You're already this person. Why should I get to steal from you? I don't like that. What I really love is the process of invention. To have characters move from the curl all the way to a full-fledged person, that's interesting.

INTERVIEWER

Do you ever write out of anger or any other emotion?

MORRISON

No. Anger is a very intense but tiny emotion, you know. It doesn't last. It doesn't produce anything. It's not creative . . . at least not for me. I mean these books take at least three years!

INTERVIEWER

That is a long time to be angry.

MORRISON

Yes. I don't trust that stuff anyway. I don't like those little quick emotions, like, "I'm lonely, *ohhh*, God. . ." I don't like those emotions as fuel. I mean, I have them, but . . .

INTERVIEWER

. . . they're not a good muse?

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MORRISON

No, and if it's not your brain thinking cold, cold thoughts, which you can dress in any kind of mood, then it's nothing. It has to be a cold, cold thought. I mean cold, or cool at least. Your brain. That's all there is.

—Elissa Schappell
with additional material
from Claudia Brodsky Lacour

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The Lives of Saints

Jeanette Winterson

That day we saw three Jews in full-length black coats and black hats standing on identical stools looking into the funnel of a pasta machine. One stepped down from his little stool and went to the front where the pasta was stretching out in orange strands. He took two strands and held them up high so that they dropped against his coat. He looked like he'd been decorated with medal ribbon.

They bought the machine. The Italian boys in T-shirts carried it to the truck. They bought the machine because they wanted to make pasta like ringlets to sell in their shop. Their shop sold sacred food and the blinds were always half drawn. The floor was just floorboard, not polished, and the glass counter stood chest high. They served together in their hats and coats. They wrapped things in greaseproof paper. They did this every day except Saturday and after the machine came they made pasta too. They lined the top of the glass counter with wooden trays and they lined the wooden trays with greaseproof paper. Then they laid out the ringlets of fusilli in colors they liked, liking orange best in memory of the first

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day. The shop was dark but for the pasta that glowed and sang from the machine.

It is true that on bright days we are happy. This is true because the sun on the eyelids effects a chemical change in the body. The sun also diminishes the pupils to pinpricks, letting the light in less. When we can hardly see we are most likely to fall in love. Nothing is commoner in summer than love and I hesitate to tell you of the commonplace but I have only one story and this is it.

In the shop where the Jews stood in stone relief like Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the fiery furnace there was a woman who liked to do her shopping in 4 ozs. Even the pasta that fell from the scales in flaming waterfalls trickled into her bag. I was always behind her, coming in from the hot streets to the cool dark that hit like a church. What did she do with her tiny parcels laid in lines on the glass top? Before she paid for them, she always counted them, if there were not sixteen she asked for something else, and if there were more than sixteen she had a thing taken away.

I began following her. To begin with I followed just a little way, then, as my obsession grew, I followed in ever-increasing circles from the shop to her home, through the park past the hospital. I lost all sense of time and space and sometimes it seemed to me that I was in the desert or the jungle and still following. Sometimes we were aboriginal in our arcane pathways and other times we walked one street.

I say we. She was oblivious to me. To begin with I kept a respectful distance. I walked on the other side of the road. Then because she never noticed, I got closer and closer, close enough to see that she colored her hair. The shade was not constant. One day her skirt had a hanging thread and I cut it off without disturbing her. At last I started to walk beside her. We fell in step without the least difficulty. And still she gave no sign of my presence. I began to wonder about myself and took to carrying a mirror to see if I was still there. So far we had walked side by side in silence. Eventually I said, "Did you know that parrots are left-handed? This is very rare in the

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animal kingdom. Most creatures are right-handed like us."

She said nothing and I dredged my mind for things that might please her.

From that day I told her everything I knew. The origin of The Magic Carpet, the nature of cities that last only one day and disappear at nightfall, the register of notes available to a frog during courtship and every story I could remember, including the shortest story in the world. It is by a Guatamalan writer called Augusto Monterroso, "Cuando despero, el dinosauro todavia estaba alli." (When I woke up, the dinosaur was still there.)

Just as Scheherazade prevented her death so I prolonged our life together with my stories. I bound us head-to-foot in words.

Nothing I said had any effect. I felt like Marco Polo who crisscrossed the world searching for a single treasure to please Kublai Khan. The Great Khan was not interested in the Silk Road or the cedar forests he owned. Rich beyond measure he desired something he could not possess. Only one thing could please him, and he did not know what that thing was. Polo brought home intricate and fabulous toys and shamans who could teach the emperor how to fly. But when the emperor died, old and exhausted, he knew the world had eluded him.

I rummaged through the out-of-print sections in second-hand bookshops and spent all my spare time in the library. I learned astronomy and mathematics and studied the drawings of Leonardo da Vinci in order to explain how a watermill worked. I was so impatient to tell her all I had discovered that I started waiting for her outside her house. Eventually I knocked on the door and knocked on the door at 7 A.M. sharp every morning after that. She was always ready. In winter she carried a torch.

After a few months we were spending the whole of each day together. I made sandwiches for our lunch. She never questioned my choice of filling though I noticed she usually threw away the ones with sardine.

St. Teresa of Avila: "I have no defense against affection. I could be bribed with a sardine."

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So it is with me for whom kindness has always been a surprise. In the lives of saints I look for confirmation of excess. To them it is not strange to spend the nights on a mountain or to forgo food. For them the visionary and the everyday coincide. Above all they have no domestic virtues, preferring intensity to comfort. Despite their inhospitable ways they ferment with unexpected life like those bleak railway cuttings that host horizontal dandelions. They know there is no passion without pain.

As I told her this as I had told her so many things, she turned to me and said, "Sixteen years ago I lived in a hot country with my husband who was important. We had servants and three children. There was a young man who worked for us. I used to watch his body through the window. In the house we lived such clean lives, always washed and talcumed against the sweat. Not the heat of the day nor the heavy night could unsettle us. We knew how to dress. One evening when the boards were creaking with the weather he came to us where we sat eating small biscuits and dropped two baskets of limes on the floor. He was so tired that he spilt the baskets and went on his knees under my husband's feet. I looked down and saw my husband's black socks within his black shoes. His toe kicked at a lime. I ducked under the table collecting what I could and I could smell the young man smelling of the day and the sun. My husband crossed his legs and I heard him say, 'No need for that, Jane.'

"Later, when we put out the lamps and I went to my room and Stephen went to his, my armpits were wet and my face looked as though I'd been drinking. I knew he'd come. I took my nightgown off and on four or five times wondering how to greet him. It didn't matter. Not then or afterwards. Not any of the two months that followed. My heart swelled. I had a whale's heart. The arteries of a whale's heart are so wide that a child could crawl through. I found I was pregnant.

"On the night I told him he told me he had to go away. He asked me to go with him and I looked at the verandah and the lamps and Stephen's door that was closed and the

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children's door that was slightly ajar. I looked at his body. I said I had to stay and he put his head on my stomach and cried. On the day he left I lay in my room and when I heard his flight coming over the house I wrapped my head in a towel. Stephen opened the door and said, 'Are you staying?' I said I was. He said, 'Never mention this again.' I never did. Not that or anything else."

We walked on in silence. We walked through the hours of the day until we arrived at nightfall and came to a castle protected by a moat. Lions guarded the gateway.

"I'm going in now," she said.

I looked up from my thoughts and saw an ordinary house fronted by a pretty garden and a pair of tabbys washing their paws. Which was the story and which was real? Could it be true that a woman who had not spoken for sixteen years except to order her food was now walking into this small house full of everyday things? Was it not more likely that she would disappear into her magic kingdom and leave me on the other side of the water, my throat clogged with feelings that resist words?

I followed her across the moat and saw our reflections in the water. I wanted to reach down and scoop her in my arms, let her run over my body until both of us were wet through. I wanted to swim inside her. We crossed the moat and she fed me on boiled cabbage. I have heard it is a cure for gout. She never spoke as we ate and afterwards she took a candle and took me upstairs. I was surprised to see a mosquito net in England.

Time is not constant and time in stories least of all. Anyone can fall asleep and lose generations in their dreams. The night I spent with her has taken up my whole life and now I live attached to myself like a codicil. It is not because I lack interests, indeed I have recently reworked Leonardo's drawings and built for myself a very fine watermill. It is simply that being with her allowed me to be myself. There was no need to live

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normally. Now, I know so many stories and such a collection of strange things and I wonder who would like them since I cannot do them justice on my own. The heart of a whale is the height of a man. . . .

I left her at dawn. The street was quiet, only a cat and the electric whir of the milk van. I kept looking back at the candle in the window until it was as far away as the faint point of a fading star. In the early sky all the stars had faded by the time I got home. There was the retreating shape of the moon and nothing more.

Every day I went to the shop where the Jews stood in stone relief and I bought things that pleased me. I took my time, time being measured in 4 ozs. She never came in. I waited outside her house for some years until a FOR SALE sign appeared and a neighbor told me the woman next door had vanished. I felt such pleasure then, to know that she was wandering the world and that one day, one day, I might find her again. When I do, all the stories that are folded into this one can be shaken out and let loose. But until then, like the lives of saints, more is contained than can be revealed. The world itself will roll up like a scroll taking time and space away. All stories end here.

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Jorie Graham

Subjectivity

1

Black bars expanding
  over an atomic-yellow ground—feelers retracted—
the monarch lay flat on the street
  and did not move at all
when I lifted it
  onto my spiral
notebook

  and did not move the whole length of the block
during which I held the purple laminated

cover still as
  possible—
my gaze
  fretting the edges of
the wings, ruffling the surface where it seemed
  light from another century
beat against those black bars—yellow, yellow, gorgeous, incandescent—

  bells, chimes, flutes, strings—wind seized and blown
open—butter yellow, fever yellow,
  yellow of acid and flax,
lemon and chrome
  madder, mikado, justic, canary—

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yellow the singers exhale that rises, fanged, laughing,
  up through the architraves and out (slow) through the hard
                                                web
the rose-windows press
  onto the rising gaze,
yellow of cries forced through that mind's design,
  like a clean verdict,
like a structure of tenses and persons for the gusting

  heaven-yellow
minutes (so many flecks, spores,
  in the wide still beam
of sun)
  or the gaze's stringy grid of nerves
spreading out onto

  whatever bright new world the eyes would seize upon—
pronged optic animal the incandescent *thing*
  must rise up to and spread into, and almost burn
                                                its way
clear through
  to be.

2

  She sits on the straightback chair in the room.
A ray of sun is calling across the slatwood floor.
  I say *she* because my body is so still
in the folds of daylight
  through which the one beam slants.
I say *calling* because it lays itself down
  with a twang and a licking monosyllable

across the pine floorboards—
  making a meaning like a wide sharp thought—
an unrobed thing we can see the inside of—
  less place than time—
less time than the shedding skin of time, the thought
                                                of time,

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the yellow swath it cuts
  on the continuum—
now to the continuum
  what she is to me,
a ceremonial form, an intransigent puissant corridor
                nothing will intersect,

and yet nothing really
  —dust, a little heat . . .
She waits.
  Her leg extended, she waits for it—
foot, instep, calf—
  the I, the beam
of sun—
  the *now* and *now*—

it moving like a destiny across,
  neither lured-on nor pushed-forward,
without architecture,
  without
beginning,
  over the book lying in the dust,

over the cracked plank—down into the crack—across—

not animal,
  nothing that can be deduced-from or built-upon,
aswarm with dust and yet
  not entered by the dust,
not *touched*—
  smearing everything with a small warm gaiety—

over the pillow-seam over the water glass—

  cracking and bending but not cracking or bending—

over the instep now, holding the foot—

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her waiting to feel the warmth then beginning
to feel it—
the motion of it and the warmth of it not identical—
the one-way-motion of it, the slow sweep,
approaching her as a fate approaches, inhuman but
resembling
feeling,

without deviation,
turning each instant a notch deeper towards
the only forwards,
but without beginning,
and never—not ever—
not moving
forwards . . .

Meanwhile the knowledge of things lies round,
over which the beam—
Meanwhile the transparent air
through or into which the beam—
over the virtual and the material—
over the world and over the world of the beholder—
glides:

it does not change, crawler, but things are
changed—
the mantle, the cotton-denim bunched at
the knees—

diamonds appearing on the tips of things then disappearing—
each edge voluble with the plushnesses of silence—

now up to her folded arms—warm under the elbow—
almost a sad smell in the honeyed yellow—
(the ridge of the collarbone) (the tuck of the neck)—
till suddenly (as if by
accident)

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she is inside—(ear, cheek)—the slice of time

now on the chin, now on
the lips, making her rise up into me,
forcing me to close my eyes,
the whole of the rest feeling broken off,

it all being my face, my being inside the beam of sun,

and the sensation of how it falls unevenly,

how the wholeness I felt in the shadow is lifted,
broken, this tip *lit*, this other *dark*—and stratified,
analysed, chosen-round, formed—

3

Home I slid it gently
into the book,
wings towards the center of the
page,
the body denser and harder to press
flat,
my mind hovering over it,
huge, ballooning, fluttering, yellow,
and back and forth,
and searching for the heaviest book
to lay upon
the specimen,
to make it flat—

as if it were still too plural, too
shade-giving, where the mind needs it
so flat the light can't
round it, licking for crevices, im-
perfections,

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even the wings still arced enough to bring
awake
the secret blacknesses
of the page—
bits of shadow off the feelers, soft dry bits off
the tiny
head—
like a betrothal of the thing to the world—
a chattery, quivery moulting of

the thing—body and wings—
so that each way I slide it the shadows slide—
almost a green in their gray—
everything on the verge—
the edge of the trunk furry—
the ever-so-slightly serrated rim of the wing—
everywhere the soft gray exaggeration—
below, around—
as if leaking from some *underneath*—

so that it is the *underneath* the mind wants to eliminate—
the imitation? the interpretation?—
me carrying, through the bountiful morning-light, the
dictionaries in—
and the 2 inches of body and 5 inches of wing dripping
with these
yellowish glances,
these thin almost icy beams I can feel my open eyes release,
widening as they sweep down
out of the retina

to take the body in—
aerial, tunneling, wanting to be spent in what cannot
feel them as they smear, coat,
wrap, diagram—

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from next door C stopping to bring the lilies in—
that butterfly's not dead, you know, she adds
noticing,
cold mornings like these they're very still—see (gliding it onto
the broad-leaved stem)
put it in sun (walking back out),
the day like a tunnel she's in,
the yellow thing at the end of her stalk and then,
placed on the lawn,
the yellow thing, the specimen,
rising up of a sudden out of its envelope of glances—

a bit of fact in the light and then just light.

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Two Poems by Bruce Bond

Documentary

I watch your hospital TV as you sleep,
two weeks you sleep, while men walk
in a silent movie, their world eroding

into grains of documentary light:
a Cleveland street in the thirties, lanes
of laundry waving like women in a parade.

I have not watched long or close enough
to know why these men have come this far,
there on the verge of speech. Something

momentous is furling their white shirts.
The younger one talks fast with his hands,
his hair standing briefly in the wind.

The sky above them is raining the scars
of countless screenings. It may as well
be the future with all its quiet insistence,

the unsteady gaze. Elsewhere in Cleveland,
others are going about their lives.
From a closer time, you would see their threads

of coalsmoke rising, hear the unconscious
clash of radios, a coat hanger's chime,
a wasp sizzling in a bowl of cream.

A few will pause without reason,
toweling the warm platter, and recall
a cloudless afternoon when a father

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or son said something that changed them,
for good, we say, thinking how it might
cross a mind four, five times maybe.

Take the moment we're living in, the traces
of words just inches from your lips.
Take the body that waits for a fever to lift

its spirits another inch, entrusting
as little as it must to *paradise*,
silence, or any final word made flesh.

Naked Eye

The least touchable of all things,
it wears our dwindled world
like a prayer on a pin, shies
away from the slightest dust,

the stray lash, a blur of flies.
Our own hands are never pure enough.
We balance lenses on our fingers
poised near the shuddering surface.

Still it would be everywhere, this eye,
in its pool the black anemone
blooming: you understand:
how it stares hours in the dim

TV light, reluctant to close,
turns red with so much going forward.
Even in our sleep, shadows
startle from the path it blazes.

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We stare into irises, their prisms
bristling with fine white hairs.
We love how the broken colors
streak out of the dark, expelled.

Small wonder, our passion for windows,
if only for their charity,
for the way we forget they're there.
Even stained glass takes us through

its body, the old wounds reddening
with promise. We come to expect them.
Nights when a wall and its window
darken to their merest difference,

our eyes brighten into beads of oil:
this too is how our needs precede us,
like a silent language of nerves,
the straight beam of a singular life

bearing down. If you look close,
you can see the tiny door sealed
on its lens. Or taken further, say,
the way one mirror rushes into another.

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Honor Moore

Bucharest, 1989

> *There were other ways that the system used to strangle artistic life. Ms. Undareanu-Herta said that in recent years it has become increasingly difficult to find oil paints, and virtually impossible to get hold of the color white.*
>
> —**The New York Times**
> December 31, 1989

It was white I wanted—of snow, clouds, of sky overcast, of
a star if you take the shine from it. Usual
sound, light, and I wake—but sense a shift
of light, a spontaneous tilt in the axis of the sky.
I cannot tell you what it was that happened
but all day I worked to paint it, no image
for the change—I needed white.
August and nature past peak. I had fled grief and a city
where the dark of black had been my modifier:
red turned devilish, green somber, yellow the ocher of walls
these years of bad coal. I wanted white—
to see what stands around me, to lighten blue
to a sky I can wake up to, of baptism dress,
bridal gown, candles Christmas—
I could not find it in any shop. There was no announcement
of the unavailability of white. Could
paint daunt a city plumbed with tunnels? A sentry on each
street,
his face tugged angular, body clad
the moonless starless color of sky the night
they took him from an orphanage cot, taught his hunger
luxury, his desire to move

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a rote of violence. I no longer ask for white. No use writing
friends or art shops in Paris—just paint white black when
a drift of light recalls candor. They puncture tubes from Paris—
crimson, cadmium, viridian
uncoil across the customs desk, turn state
fingers colors I could paint desire. See the glint
of white on the old man's brow,
his wife behind him hissing assent—a family of tyrants
with a maggot lust for gold. I turn from gold now,
even the ring my grandmother left. How am I capable
of this much hatred? White vertical
cities where our villages were. Cold of
my own embrace this lifetime of unheat. The routine
balcony panegyric—
a Sunday like any other, then through the crowd something
whines
toward rupture, his arms wild like wash in a storm, his
face as the crowd turns, no guard standing fast, silence from
the white
screen, and then music. Someone will know
who first shouted, how long it took our breaths to
open with something like emotion, who carried fresh
oranges from the tunnels, cut a circle
from the center of the flag, who told the first lie.

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Three Poems by Richard Frost

Neighbor Blood

Park Ridgeway's wife, this hot August afternoon,
comes shrieking across the street with one hand
over her left eye, beats on the front door,
and Skipper the Jack Russell terrier
goes hysterical, yapping and yodeling
and springing at the curtains and tearing them.
Just fine, just fine, my old man keeps saying,
and she's there in the kitchen with a wet washcloth
over the swollen eye and crying and bending over
and then it really starts. I'm a little kid,
so I'm no help. What do I know? My mother
is running cold water on another washcloth
and folding it into a smaller square and trading
washcloths, and then you can hear these big feet
on the porch, and hollering, and I run into the front
hallway behind my father, and Ridgeway smashes
his fist through our leaded glass window
beside the front door and reaches around inside
and yells you bastards. So my father takes Ridgeway's
wrist in both hands and just cranks his arm
in a circle, then pushes it right down
onto the edge of the broken window glass,
and that's basically the end of this story
because I went upstairs and got in my closet.
They're all dead anyway, and it's a long time
since that neighbor blood was wiped up
and dried up and it went back into basic atoms
and molecules and, who knows, maybe it's part
of my blood now, or yours, or part of anybody's.

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The Indian

A little boy joins a club called the Friendly Indians.
His parents think it will be good for him. At the powwow
he is given a project, to make an old Indian
out of an apple by letting the apple rot.
The skin wrinkles and turns brown. You push
a feather into the back of the head. Two cloves
make the eyes. It starts well, but in a week
a black mouth grows on one side of the apple,
wider and deeper until the face is ready
to cave in, atop the kid's bureau,
where he's poked in the cloves and feather and turned
the apple so the sodden scowl faces the doorway.
Each day of the project the eyes close more tightly.
He names the apple Little Mush Bag and wants
to quit Friendly Indians. But his parents
keep taking him to the meetings, where he learns
to say, "I second that." He is taught
how to assemble wampum and how to construct
a tom-tom out of an oatmeal box. Eventually
the little boy gets promoted to Brave
and has a turn wearing the full headdress
of turkey feathers and can make a whooping noise
without patting his mouth with the palm of his hand.
He dances around the cellophane campfire and whoops.
The Friendly Indians have done him a lot of good:
He has made things with his hands.
He knows how to get along with other boys.
He has experienced parliamentary procedure.
Best of all, he has learned about another culture
and how it feels to be an Indian.

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The Change

The wife has painted the bedroom floor, and tonight
they are downstairs in the study, in the pullout bed
next to the sliding glass door. Beyond the deck
and back lawn their land climbs to a wood
and then a meadow. The world is awash in moonlight
so that from the clear dark cloud of the pear tree
plainly hangs the rope, still, where her boys
swung and laughed and landed, in those early days.
With her sleeping husband she lies in the bed and sees
the smoothed, long-shadowed moonlit land they own,
the room, too, full of a quiet glamour
that falls across the bookshelves and the table,
out across the blankets and the floor
and deck and lawn and up into the trees
like a dream of gardens and assurances
well-painted and alive.
                And then a cry
floats to her from out of the night somewhere,
rising cold in the glassed-out shining wind
a long moment, a thin bleating baby call
a rabbit makes when caught by a cat or a fox,
makes once, one time, only that once.

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Andrew Feld

Not Included in this Landscape

are any houses. That's for sure. And as for
cars, trucks, tractors, trailers, motorcycles,
you're in another universe, friend. At most
we would allow a dirt road, seedy, unkempt,
to walk across the marsh and fizzle out,
diffused into a field. We could tolerate that.

It still might be possible to have a hill
although it's certainly a risk—and we're not big on risks,
anymore. But it would be worth it
to see the marsh and the marsh birds, hawks, heavy-winged,
rising with feet full of mice and crying triumph.
We could surround ourselves with hills.

Should there be an ocean? We could accept
a flat bay with a weak edge tapping the shoreline,
like impatient fingers on a tabletop.
We have seen all we need of storms:
The heavy wave lifted to slap the face of a friend,
the scene in the restaurant, the crying jag in the passenger seat.

And what else? Nothing else.
The airplane would fall into the sea,
beyond our horizon, and the lovers would stay at home:
they can perform their own indoor pastorals,
but it does not interest us. Here, our worries are more material:
the clattering of machinery, beyond the hills, demanding
inclusion.

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Three Poems by Richard Lyons

Vantage Point

I keep returning to that window
in the mountains of southern Bavaria.

I'm pushing the halves open
to the bright sun on sapphires in the shape of trees.

For the oddest most subjective reasons
the washstand—a porcelain cup—could be a chalice of
polished bone

or an old Jew's brittle spine, the body's plumbing.

But of course such vagaries of resemblance don't belong on
paper.
Outside my room, a young Turkish chamber boy
rolls bedsheets around his frail black arms.

He's singing to himself in the hard syllables
of my incomprehension a delicate halting song.

For all I know it could be the sound of half-tracks
churning up the gravel on the road outside his home.

For all I know it could be the song of the spider
shearing down the ivory of his father's ribcage.

Behind the boy is a tapestried landscape
that grows up the hall & down the stairway.

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In it, horses climb the first jagged cliffs,
each horse hooded, one dead diamond per forelock.
These might as well be Hannibal's harebrained scheme
to conquer the economy of Venus & Apollo,
the perfect white curves
Carthaginians couldn't begin to imagine till now:
the serrated snow brow of mountain, snowblind mighty forms.

One by one & slowly, loaded with provisions & weapons & food,
the elephants muscle patience along the edge of the world.

O dark homunculus, riding the sky,
is it wonder you coax into that giant ear,
the beast's breath like a windsock in the cold blue Alpine air?

•

One swath of blue is hoisted above the town
where I'm called "professor" for teaching rules to soldiers.

The radar dish tracks the valley into Austria.

Somewhere, adumbrated in blips on a screen,
are the figures of animals we want or fear to see.

In the distance, skiers trace painless scars on powder.

This is the last thing.
This is the next: the commingling of twilight & fire.
I'm talking to Curt who argues for "strike capability."
The other day, he says, a green helicopter pilot
dropped twelve men: fractured jaw, extended tibia, broken foot. . . .

Mornings when able-bodied men patrol the mountain
—small black shadows across shelves of snow—
I wonder: would all this give way beneath a thought
that's slipped the mind, softly & a long way down.

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Rockface buttresses snow,
it buoys Hannibal's crack troops across a continent,
it buttresses even time.

But maybe what holds everything up is the light,
the way it loves everything it falls on,
each branch, each invisible stone.
Is it my own aloneness I'm looking through
at this, this . . . black dog, this asterisk
throbbing on snow?
It keeps my sight going, in any case, endlessly
across waves of pure, wedding-cake drifts.
Then it tumbles through the ancient blue arms of spruce,
which break its fall. I know, I can
still hear the barking: *catch me*, *little man*,

find the stew bone
your mother, the loving German witch-lady,
gave me for my repertoire of roll-over & fetch,

find the stew bones, little man, in the endless avalanche
of stew bones, in the steamy elephant ossuary of snow.

Stanzas Written at Baba Yaga's

in memory of L.S.

From a live oak, a feeder swings
in a gust of wind I can barely hear
as I reread your postcard of Ayrshires
shiny & staid as showroom cars.

In a Minnesota city clinic
you traced these perfect smoky letters
sung an octave higher than the words
chemo, just three big nasty ones.

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We all believed, if anyone,
you'd beat the body's rudeness
the way you strafed each high-jinks
high-school jock with your long best lines.

These always made me want to run home
and write beyond my envy any word
too good for ink. Now there's nothing
to outdo but an ache that grows like algae.

Lynda, did the broken fist of your lung
go limp, your breath quit, the windows silver?
I don't want to remember you
any other way but in that blue

secondhand dress with the low neckline
I always wanted to touch, there, on the breastbone
to know how it felt to tread so lightly,
resilient after years on a Wisconsin dairy

with an army of ash-blond sisters.
You said you loved them because they were there
and you here in the damp gulf plains
where I turn my attention to the wind

as it lifts potato chip bags from the gutter
and filigrees the sheath of rain on the glass.
It's not a clearing of the air exactly,
this watching circumstance bore itself with wind,

but a way to stave off pain:
how red & blue Styrofoam balls
inside a metal cage the shape
of the globe burst soundlessly

above a quilt of bingo cards
and your mother's dour stare.
Lynda, I remember a talk we had
after months of my monkish study.

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It was cloudy with patches of bright sun
in an umbrella'd café beneath palms.
You lit a Kent & blew the smoke aside
to say, "Oh, Rich, it isn't that bad."

Next to me, rocking in a red chair,
a woman is reading Simone de Beauvoir,
her hair is spiked with a roseate frost.
I kid myself she looks like you

but her glow is artificial,
brightened with the sweet allure
of shaded features that aren't hers
or mine or even yours, Lynda,

in your sweet indifferent palace of thin air.
The window behind her is filling with light
as she hoists a coconut & white rum.
She has her tongue lost in the green meat

of an avocado. She grins a chin-line beard
and brief moustache. She swears
in a language I've never heard,
with words maybe even you would envy.

Archaic Smile

Skin pallid, lips painted,
jars of pills on the bedside,
you are beautiful.

In bed, your spine like an electric cable
knocked down in a storm, you are beautiful.

Wearing a plaster corset with a sickle of roses
curved beneath a breast, you are beautiful.

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Each of the fingers
on your left hand
is also braced—huge rings. Two on the thumb,
and on the finger after all these years
still the fuck-you finger

is a ring with delicate demarcations
of longtitude & latitude,
a replica of your beloved hemisphere
reduced to half a hard-boiled egg
on the raft of your bed.

It's 1951,
the day I strangled out my first cry.
It was for you, Frida, it's for you.

Holding a life-sized sugar skull with your name
written in white worms of icing across a chocolate hairline,

with white loops of infinity streaming back over the pate,
you turn to me

and I tip my hat, saying a lot of nothing,
saying, "You are beautiful, Frida, simply beautiful!"

You peel one of the eyebrows off the death's-head
and lift it toward me.

"It's cinnamon, silly, eat it."

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On the Literary Life



Selections from the

John Cheever Journals

1946–1981

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John Cheever, 1971.

My father had a black Remington portable. He hit the keys so ardently that he wore their letters off. He'd sit at that machine and smoke cigarettes and drink coffee and make the most ferocious sound, not like a typewriter at all, more like a machine gun.

He wrote novels, letters and, of course, stories. He also kept a journal. This was typed on lined paper and collected in miniature loose-leaf notebooks. There were twenty-eight of these notebooks when he died.

No, he didn't write in his journals with the idea that they would be read by anybody else. We weren't even supposed to peek. But yes, ultimately he wanted them published, although he didn't make that decision until quite late in life. These were workbooks, a place to take notes, to practice and to fume.

The entries were not dated. Nor was there any attempt to bring order. He'd take up a lined page, type on it until he was done, and then he'd put it aside. Add to this the fact that my father was a fiction machine. Give him a screwdriver, have him walk across the room, and he'd be holding a hammer.

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Often, in the course of a paragraph, he'd jump from fact to fiction and back to fact.

Line up these obstacles, and you see what a miracle Robert Gottlieb performed in excerpting a sort of memoir from the mass of words. This was published by Knopf in 1991.

The magnificent thing about the journals is that they present the writer at his most candid, nasty and depressed. For those of us who perform our wretched lives against the glowing and imaginary world that advertisers, TV producers, and—to a lesser extent—movie directors throw up at us, it can be a relief to see such unhappiness in a man of some stature.

The trouble with the journals is that they present one strand of a relatively complex piece of tapestry. They give the impression that my father spent his entire life sitting around feeling worthless. Of course he did spend a lot of time sitting around feeling worthless. But that time was recorded disproportion-

In the story of the friendship there might be some piece of transcendent generosity. It might be a stock market tip, what else, a job, a present, a car, but you can't give me a car. This is ridiculous. I have this kind of money; I made fifty thousand last week on speculation. But I won't accept it. And he is wounded and angry, starts up the driveway. But please try and understand; please try to understand me. Then he accepts it; they go back and have a drink. There's something you don't know. What. This is my birthday. We were born on the same day; the same year. But what can I get you. You can get me another drink. Is that all that is definitely all. And then the scene of sickness or injury. He might break his leg skiing. I've broken my fucking leg and appear to be going into shock. We laughed. I guess the thing to do is to wait. So he would stop the next skier, ten minutes later he might hold his friend in his arms. Then the patrol comes down with the toboggon; puts a splint on his leg. I don't know what his wife is like; I can't imagine her. I don't think it ends with a murder; I don't know where it goes.

mr hmli gt

Mr h lights a match on the
tacontm plane to c heck the ox ygen supply
Th match do es not burn. What the hell is wrong
with this machine.

The rin g of lig ht that encircles a woman's
bre ast.

A facsimile page from Cheever's journal.

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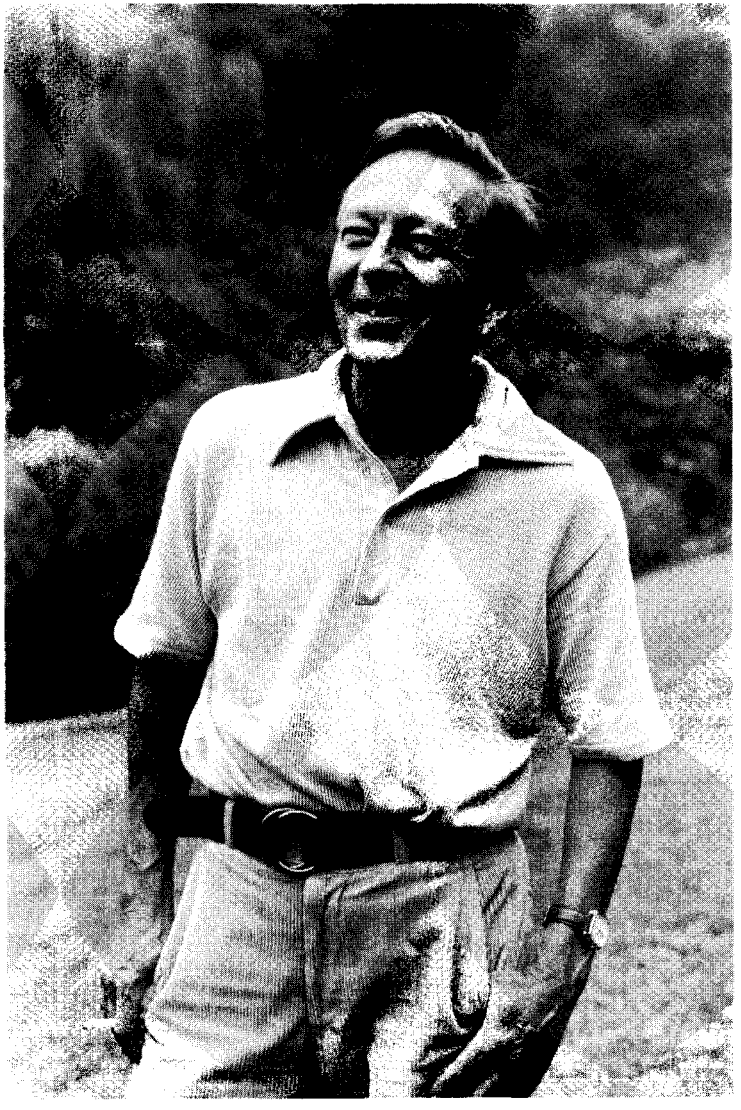
ately in his journals, which probably took him about fifteen minutes a day to write.

The Paris Review *has now gone back to the original notebooks and unearthed a good deal of fascinating and previously unpublished material on writing and other writers. It makes a great read. But the distortion is even more pronounced. He's not just sitting around feeling worthless, now he's sitting around feeling worthless and fretting about his place in the literary sweeps. Please remember that this is just one piece of the man. An interesting piece, I think: diverting, instructive, candid and intimate. But not the whole guy.*

So read it, but remember also the stories, the novels, and the man whom friends and neighbors were always so happy to see. I liked to hear the rattle of that old Remington. He was working, and it was hard, it was deadly work. But that wasn't all of it. I could be wrong, of course, but it seemed to me, to his son, that John Cheever was also having the time of his life.

—Benjamin Cheever

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Cheever, 1976.

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1946–1956

It is still, even in writing for *The New Yorker*, a question of feeling strongly, of being alive. It can be the first thing you see in the morning; a wet roof reflecting the bleak light, the suspicion that your wife's legs under the table may be touching the legs of someone else, the happiness of burning up the road between New Haven and Sturbridge on your way home. In signing a contract with *The New Yorker* there are certain apprehensions as if writing were a mystery, something as chancy as a long shot on a wet track with mud all over the silks and the bums crowded in under the grandstand out of the rain. I have twelve stories to write and they'll be good.

To bring out a collection of short stories this fall: "Torch Song," "City of Broken Dreams," "Percy," "The Day the Pig Fell into the Well," "The Enormous Radio," "The Season of Divorce," "The Sutton Place Story," "The Pot of Gold," perhaps, "The Radio Man," I mean "The Elevator Man" and to write a couple of stories to complement the collection, a couple of long pieces with no dying fall. Read at the office yesterday most of the stories I've written in the last five years and was, quite incidentally, exhilarated and happy to leave the office for the open streets at five. The stories didn't seem too good. The war stories are spoiled with chauvinism, a legitimate weakness, I also found pitiful evidences of poorly informed snobbism, an exaggerated wish to impress my knowledge of army prose upon the reader and associated with this a tendency to use verbatim conversation rather than the remarks that should be made by my characters. Some of the best of it seems to be the set descriptions of character: Emma Boulanger had the soul of a housemaid, etc. This I picked up from Flaubert and it is showing signs of turning into a bad characteristic of generalization. I can use these set pieces if they are integrated

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into a crisis. My interim narrative style needs a lot of work. Love of sorts is reasonably well described. There are too many scornful and fine phrases. These should be characters of the imagination.

After reading his [John Updike's] prose, any of it, a line here and there, I have to go through a long reassessment of my own aims, with what is limpid in my style, with my distaste for the vernacular, my exactitude, my long twilights, my scenes, my confinement, in expressing love and death, to the genteel symbols of the middle class. Despair is a shirt without any buttons; joy is a surplus in the checking account. In other people's fiction—in my own feelings—there is a hunger for richness, for the renaissance, for the blue rivers that come down from the Alps, for the girls with round breasts and pearls, for gold, for silver and the smell of salt water in the churches of Venice. It seems to be a partly inhibited craving. I don't express it well. I have looked at these riches for so long with restraint.

I think continually of travel; of the customs shed in Genoa, the distant noise of traffic, a third-rate hotel room with a red plush canopy over the bed, the directress of the English school in Florence, reading an Italian grammar on a deck chair in rough weather and giving it up at eleven to go down to the bar for a drink. Telling dirty jokes on the gravel driveway just before dark. I think continually of travel.

I dream that I am walking with Updike. The landscape seems out of my childhood. A familiar dog barks at us. I see friends and neighbors in their lighted windows. Updike juggles a tennis ball that is both my living and my dying. When he drops the ball I cannot move until it is recovered and yet I feel, painfully, that he is going to murder me with the ball. He seems murderous and self-possessed. I must try to escape. There is a museum with a turnstile, a marble staircase and statuary. In the end I do escape.

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Three stories back from the NY'er and I'm glad to have them all back they are all so poor, so trivial, so much in them is wrong. At least I can see this far; perhaps I can see how to extend them. This internecine climate makes considerable assaults on my virility. And damages my powers of perception, compassion, love. How good it is to have the senses open again; to overcome the sense of fundamental damage.

I think today of a burning glass; these clear green trees standing in the deep grass, covered with white flowers, from some happier time. And I wonder if these wild excursions into self-discovery might not damage my interest in fictions and contrivances; but this cannot be so since I believe that writing is an account of the powers of extrication. And I must say this in "West Farm."

Again; this is what I want to do; to write something that describes the growth of a personality. For Coverly this process of growth would be so painful that he might be tempted. He seemed to be changing his form; to be putting off an old skin. His apprehensions about the success of this metamorphosis; his excitement at the happiness it promised, and the mental and physical anguish of reforming so many deeply rooted habits seemed to tax his strength. He found himself torn by the generation of nearly unbearable tensions. And mingled with this triumph was a bitter sense of loss. He would remember coming back from a trout stream in the northern woods late in the day, following tiredly with his eyes the path that would take him back to where his boat was moored and where he would cross the lake to the camp where there would be dry fire-wood and a bed to sleep in. He had stayed at the stream too late; the woods were getting dark. Just before dark the path he had followed with so much good cheer and confidence dwindled into a narrow animal track—a thread—and vanished in a bed of ferns. He was lost. Coverly drank nearly a pint of whiskey before lunch.

Reading some S.B. [Saul Bellow], early S.B. last night. His mastery of the descriptive set piece is admirable. So is his

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intellectual vigor; his determination to seek and hold an emotional and a philosophical point of view, he makes it a passionate and an erudite search; and yet for reasons that I don't know I felt that I was looking into something less than I aimed for; that I was looking down.

Having met Katherine Anne [Porter] on the street and acting, to the best of my intelligence in consideration of my curiosity, her gifts and her loneliness, I asked her for dinner and drank too much. We are not good friends; we are not sympathetic. I feel that she is old and perhaps vain and I do not feel that I can honor her as an old woman or delight in her as a young one. She ceaselessly kneads her face with her hands, drawing it back into the smoothness that it has lost. She spoke of poetry with information and passion.

Still in a slump. V.W. [Virginia Woolf] reads Shakespeare and the lesser-known Elizabethans, but I don't have this culture or this intelligence. Still sitting around, waiting to be complimented. Read some V.W. and some R.P.W. [Robert Penn Warren]; be patient.

I have written to myself imaginary letters of praise from Auden, Bellow, Trilling, and have imagined a complimentary telephone call from Red [Robert Penn Warren] and Eleanor [Clark]. I have also imagined opportunities from Hollywood and Broadway. In fact I have received one letter from a man in a rest home.

The trouble with the Hackers is that I can't write very well about the rich. In the summer months the Atlantic coast, north from Long Island up into Maine and including all the sea islands seems to become a kind of social clearing house and as you sit on the sand, watching and listening to the heavy furniture of the North Atlantic, figures from your past appear in the surf like the plums in a pudding. A wave takes form, accelerates its cocksure ride over the shallow, boils and breaks,

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The journal stinks;try the house-breaker;I have a second take on The Country Husband. It doesn't seem any good and i sit here waiting to be complimented.

This seems to be a kind of gotohell day. So far as I know equanamity and patience are mostly what I need. My mind seems idle and sordid. Half-wrote a letter to Malcolm,played a little Chopin,oh to get back to work.

Still in a slump. VW reads Shakespear and the lesser-known Elizabethans,but I don't have this culture or this intelligence. Still sitting around,waiting to be complimented. Read some VW and some RPW;be patient.

I have written to myself imagining letters of praise from Auden, Bellow, Welty, Meyers and have imagined a complimentary telephone call from Roth and Ellison. I have also imagined opportunities from Hollywood and Broadway. The fact I have received no letters from a man in a suit home.

Still this low comedy of waiting to be complimented on the CH. Half asleep I saw letters so numerous that they had to be tied into bundles;but nothing this morning at the PO (which I visited twice) but a belltin from the League of Women Voters. Up at three Am to smok a cigaret in the dark livingroom and think of the housebreaker,but it still is not appealing.

A beautiful day,opalescent—the river,the sky,the deep coloring of the shadows,the Rosemonds green fields,the children on their way to school,the pearly skies and many kinds of strong blue in the water. (And Saturday on the golf links a small tree without a leaf left on it,black with rain,but on the ground beneath it in a nearly perfect circle,all its leaves lay thickly bmbthmbgbmhmd around the trunk, shinning like yellow fire on this dour,wet,morning.

To make writing—my kind of writing—have any value—one must moge with the greatest possible candor—and in this connection I must fit in somewhere the nature of these arbitrary depressions,. Sitting in the balcony of the Colonial Theatre in Boston I suffer a despair.

A facsimile of a page from Cheever's journals.

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revealing Consuelo Roosevelt and Mr. and Mrs. Dundas Vanderbilt and the children of both their marriages. Then a wave comes in from the right like a cavalry charge, bearing landwards on a rubber raft Lathrope Macy with Emerson Crane's second wife, followed by the Bishop of Pittsburgh, in an inner tube. Then a wave breaks at your feet, an earth-shaking noise and there are the Hackers, Pete and Alfreda. How nice to see you, how *very* nice.

In reading Isak Dinesen's self-designated Gothic tales, loaded down as they are with diamonds and emeralds, great halls, miles of plush and best of all, forests and oceans, the old proposition that the love of beauty and the love of death are allied, reappears. What troubles me perhaps is a trace of inflexibility in my own point of view; the feeling that I may be guarded and nervous when there is no need for this. This can be wrong; it can be like Coverly's microscope. "Death in Venice" is the champion of this kind of Gothic sentiment. This seems to me close to false emotion. That it was something else yesterday is unimportant; we defend ourselves. Decay plainly has its charms—the faded rose, etc.—but so does good health and its loves and these days that begin with a swelling of dark red and orange lights in the east that are swiftly extinguished by a sky colored like sailcloth and that will not change its dark grey until the light is drawn off it.

It seems that writers should have some part-time job like rerouting trains on the New York, New Haven and Hartford. I cannot work the day after a party, I cannot refuse all invitations and I cannot account for dim days like yesterday. The sky heavily overcast, the air wet and cool. The looks of snow, but too warm.

1956–1962

I would like a more muscular vocabulary. And I must be careful about my cultivated accent. When this gets into my prose my prose is at its worst.

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I read the Salinger story three times and don't know what to make of it. His prose is excellent and supple but he seems very close to crazy. I am reminded of the bitterness in my own work, that bitterness that is not art but that is its opposite. So I would like to write a story that is all yellow, yellow, yellow, the brightest yellow.

I am less concerned with the scope of my prose style than I am with the scope of my imagination. A surrogate prose style loses velocity and a swift prose style loses elegance and penetration. I can hit a sour note. I am interested in language but my gifts may not lie there.

The blonde on the train. Around thirty-five, nicely boned, slender, but attractively upholstered. Oh very attractive. She has some elegance but nothing, I think, to do with class or money. She carries her striking shoulders as if they were naked. She chats, she handles her cigarette as if it weighed ten pounds, she touches her pretty hair, she coughs (she has a terrible gin-cum-cigarette cough) and throws back her head to laugh. She's married of course (who isn't) perhaps for the second time and will be an excellent wife. She seems to know what men want. She's been loved by eight men, no more no less. She may tangle with a few more before it's over. But the sense is that she's taking it on the lam, that she's spending more than comes in. The whole thing, even the cigarette cough, looks dissipated, and why? Because at bottom there is some profound discontent, some infection, some unrequited taste, some flair, some extravagance, some fondness for the light that drives her to spend it all more quickly than it can renew itself—a charming quality, really the thing beneath her desirability, and for her a cruel grave.

[John] O'Hara in *The New Yorker*. I think of him scornfully until I read it and then I admire him. It is a very long-winded account of the comings and goings, the affairs and fortunes of some pretty dull people but it is all imbued with a strength

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of character, some kind of self-knowledge and an extraordinary ability to take his world seriously, its cars, barbers, shoe-laces, fashions, etc. I have never taken it seriously, never been able to. You won't find any descriptions of rainwinds here—visions of lost youth, but the prose is muscular, pedestrian, expensively dressed, never brilliant, but it has qualities I admire.

And another story by O'Hara who is, I think, coming into some bitter twilight of late middle age where full-breasted girls of nineteen throw themselves at grey-beards, where, when he hears the whistling of a train in the distance he thinks only of the venereal possibilities of travel, who is reminded by the milkman of adulterous housewives and who, seeing the gentle lights of a cottage late at night, thinks that somebody is tying a can on.

I stuff the last O'Hara novel into the garbage pail. Well says M. [Mary Cheever], you certainly enjoyed it. What there is to learn is his slogging along, not so much like an infantryman as an old-fashioned mail carrier. He writes with the confidence, the boorishness of a man who knows that his audience is enslaved. Enslaved they are because as a pornographer he is successful. He generates and belabors an atmosphere of venery that will stir the weariest cock. Now and then he brings off a scene but the drama is mostly dependent upon sexual commerce. But there is the slogging to observe.

Work, although I am distracted by the family's departure for the beach and think that I bet O'Hara never let himself be distracted this way.

I would like to avoid indecency, but to overlook the fact that we have, after a long struggle, achieved a practical degree of sexual candor would be like perching on a stool and writing with a quill pen by candle light. We have the freedom to describe erotic experience and it seems irresistible.

Trouble with the magazine [*The New Yorker*] in which I

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first agree to a substantial cut, read a foolish and laudatory magazine article on Salinger, go into a slow burn that turns to a drunken rage where I call Bill [William Maxwell] and refuse to make the cut. I am troubled. In the morning, inhaling deeply, I go into town to repair the story. The whole incident seems senseless and indigestible, perhaps because I cannot accept the degree of my dependence upon the tastes of others and in general my lack of success.

First I want a landscape that corresponds to the landscapes of our dreams. It can be anything—frame houses, palaces, farms, fishing shacks but it must have the fitness of those houses we walk through, those beaches we swim on while we sleep. And I would like a narrative pace that has the quality of story-telling, that lost art.

Hemingway shot himself yesterday morning. There was a great man. I remember walking down a street in Boston after reading a book of his and finding the color of the sky, the faces of strangers and the smell of the city heightened and dramatized. The most important thing he did for me was to legitimize manly courage, a quality that I had heard, until I came on his work, extolled by scout-masters and others who made it seem a fraud. He put down an immense vision of love and friendship, swallows and the sound of rain. There was never, in my time, anyone to compare with him.

I move slowly and painfully, like an old man. Pain seems like a rivet put through my chest into my back. Then I think that I shall not live to see the spring; I shall soon die. John is dead, he died quite suddenly. Do try to get to the church early. We are so afraid there won't be room. My muffled voice rises from the casket: "But I haven't finished my work. My seven novels, my two plays and the libretto for an opera. It isn't done." The priest tells me to be still. Preparations are made for a crowd but on the big day the telephone begins to ring: It's Binxie's only chance to play golf. We're sure John

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would understand. He was always so carefree. It's Mable's only chance to go shopping, etc. In the end no one comes. I see the disgusting morbidity of all this. I try to cleanse my mind. If we do not taste death, how will we know the winter from the spring. I paint shutters, cut a little wood, light a fire. The clear light of the fire is appealing, this and the sound of water is what I want. How far away from X's underwear, lying on the floor in a heap. I will have love tonight, I think, fire and water, and I drink to still my anxieties and misgivings, but I fail. I have been in this poor place before and I shall find my way out.

The foolish hours I spend sitting in my library. I think that a writer, my kind of writer, shouldn't have too much impedimenta and what do I mean by this: chairs and tables, carpets and views of Rome. I mean either this, or that since the possibilities of luck and disaster are always vivid for my kind of writer, it may be that it takes me longer to accustom myself to an environment. All of this will change; so will everything else, but now I like to think of the house and its contents as belonging to M. and the children, I like to feel that this bare room with its chair and table is all I possess. Anxiety, from which I am suffering, strikes directly at my scrotum.

I read some [John] Marquand, furtively, and yet I have more to learn from him than from [Gregor] von Rezzori. It all seems very old-fashioned like a Staffordshire castle or cottage, all covered with dust and I think the itemized furnishing, paintings and silver, are vulgar but they are, after all, something to think about before you go to sleep. The line is broad and clear, he is a story-teller. In the opening paragraphs a trip to a strange milieu is announced. So is the passion of ambition. People from the west are introduced to the New England haut monde, their diamonds and sapphires flashing in the twilight. But here is a whole range of familiar emotion, ambition, home-coming, a bulky and likeable hero with bluff manners

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and yet the old man, with considerable cunning, makes us wonder if he isn't drinking too much, if this won't be his downfall. There is nothing penetrating but the facts are straight. There is a clash of manners, a world of great possibilities is spread out before a boy of fifteen who has the shrewdness to mind his manners and who is liked by everyone. This is Little Lord Fauntleroy all over again and yet Lord Fauntleroy is not too far from our dreams. Another splendid day and I think I will walk to Cascada.

I read a Hawthorne story and the prose seems to me bad, stale. He writes of Secret Sins and I do not know what he means. I suspect that he jerked off in the wardrobe a few times and this is what is meant. In a sense great literature illuminates the fields of wisdom that are to be opened. There is nothing in Dostoyevsky or Flaubert, to pick two men at random, that is made obsolete by Freud. However, as I see it, Hawthorne's sense of secret vice has become puerile.

Read the Updike book and this elsewhere. I have to do the revision on "Melissa," "The Lost Girl," the speech, the scientists, the Capri thing, the institute letter, and yet I accomplish nothing. Reading about Mailer I feel, humorously, that here is the kind of literary personality whose most inconsequential tastes and mistakes are interesting and I feel the threat of failure, old age, my inability to meet the mortgage payments, to write well, to give strength and counsel to my sons. I seem to partake, half asleep, of my mother's infectious social discouragements, the heavy, the naked, the nearly animal resentment at being outcast. Second-hand clothes that didn't fit, lost friends, athletic incompetence, poor marks, no pocket money, bad food in a dark lunch-room where nobody much wanted to sit with me, the sense of being deposed, the member of a deposed family.

The dog days go on. I read the Hemingway book [*A Moveable Feast*]. This arouses those mixed feelings we endure when

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some intact part of adolescence clashes with the men we have become. As a young man my absorption in his work was complete. I imitated his person and his style. He writes with the galvanic distortion that gives the illusion of a particular vision; that is he breaks and reforms the habitual rhythms of introspection. I think I think his remarks about [F.] Scott [Fitzgerald]'s cock are in bad taste as may be the quarrel between [Gertrude] Stein and her friend. I am for some reason embarrassed by his references to walking home on the dry snow and making love.

Saul Bellow blows in at half-past eleven. The fine, pale face the uncommonly large eyes with their startling show of white and for me, as often for a stranger on a train, a deep and sometimes troubling sense of kinship as if we had, somewhere between Montreal and Chicago, between Quincy and Rome, shared the burdens of a self-destructive uncle. This is not a friendship or an acquaintance; but when he comes across the hall to say goodbye my instinct is to hold him back, to plead with him to stay although I never seem to have much to say to him. He has nearly finished another novel; and I have not.

1964–1966

I write fond and witless letters, drive here, drive there, make a simple airplane model for my youngest son. It is getting dark. Will the glue dry in time for us to fly the plane? It does, just. I don't drink until four but then I belt it in. Call the Updikes, unsober. He is unyielding, really inscrutable. Can it be that he dislikes me. How could such a thing come to pass! Czechoslovakia is worth a good two or three weeks, he says, talking like a travel agent. He seems impenetrable. I think he may be both proud and jealous. He may be intensely competitive. And I think of those men, men in their fifties who feel that their indispensability has never been appreciated; that they've been taken for granted. The attitude itself

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implies colorlessness, petulance. One must have the vigor to bear one's disappointments lightly, Mary Updike says she is homesick for Russia.



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Cheever and Updike at the American Institute of Arts & Letters.

I sit at a large desk on which there is a polished brass stamp box, scales, paper weights, letter openers and so forth. On my right is a pile of clean yellow paper and on my left a pile of manuscript. I write in a small clear hand with a lead pencil and the words flow without interruption. As I watch myself I cover six or seven pages. My prose is somber and manly, the story I write is simple and compelling and nowhere eccentric. I seem to have recaptured the gift of narrative. I don't know what my subject is—love and death—but it is the extraordinary steadiness with which I work. The work seems to cost me nothing in energy or peace of mind. When I have covered twelve or fifteen pages I ring a bell. A pleasant manservant enters with an ice bucket which he places on the bar. He then removes the manuscript. I pour four or five fingers of gin over some ice, flavor this with a little vermouth and walk around

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my warm, well appointed study contentedly. It is a very large house.

On the Salinger thing I do feel, especially in the later stories, that while he writes with gentleness and grace there is underlying much of what he has to say a deep and bitter quality of resentment at discovering that there are other passengers on this ship and that, for all the brilliance of his gifts he sometimes moves, in spite of himself, with the sullenness of someone hogging a seat in the subway. But this is a characteristic he shares with Cummings who could never admit the existence of a colleague who hid himself in the old house at Silver Lake; the slum in the village. I am mature enough to escape any sort of resentment but it does give me some insight into the feelings of those who are or feel themselves to be unlucky.

The night wind is fresh and moves cursively through these old rooms; but at three when I wake it is hot and I wonder why can't I transform the love I feel for my youngest son, for them all into the energies I need for this work. This is their only inheritance from me and how, under the circumstances, can I piss away an hour, a day.

I drink gin and read [Henry] James. I'm not sure of my motives in reading him, beyond passing time, and I'm not at all sure of his motives in putting down the tribulations of Hyacinth Robinson. One must scrupulously avoid in fiction the feeling that the author is wasting his time; that his occupation is idle and undignified, rather like nose picking.

I think of Yaddo. There is a stretch of lawn between the pool and the clothesline where we are supposed to hang our trunks that seems to represent high spirits, work done or progressing, stout friendships and spry loves; but I think of the big house with distaste. One tries to track down melancholy in terms of color, smell, not faces, not things heard. I am miserable, it seems because of the thick coats of varnish on

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the imitation Renaissance furniture; I am sad because of the faded Turkish rugs. I grieve because of the bitter incompatibility set up by a brass candelabra and a Florentine chair.

It seems to me that one of the most critical problems faced today by a young writer of fiction is the emphasis on explicit descriptions of sexual intercourse. [. . .] The change, mutations and flow of literature, painting and music seem not to be organic. [. . .] For a writer of my generation to claim that explicit descriptions of fucking, etc. will reach a saturation point and that readers will presently long for accounts of family life, storms at sea—the usual paraphernalia of fiction may be equally mistaken. One has two images. One of a lovely woman in a chair—perhaps a rocking chair—sewing blue cloth. The second is of the same woman, naked, with "fuck me" written on her back side. Both images are persuasive and full of meaning but it seems to me that the second is irresistible. My feeling is that one of your problems, perhaps your principal problem, is how to manage this irresistibility.

A pall of decency settled over English literature after the death of Chaucer and with a few exceptions remained intact until the publication of *Ulysses* fifty years ago. We have nothing more brilliant, explicit and lovely than Molly Bloom's soliloquy. But this, as is the case with extreme brilliance, produced no imitators. However some forty years later we had Henry Miller, Mailer, Updike, Roth and hundreds, literally hundreds of novelists who assumed that once the fields of masturbation, buggery and cocksucking were open they had only to appear there to be acclaimed; but to carry on the image of a playing field they were men who could neither throw nor catch the ball. I know a man who, on an institutional grant, wrote a novel about a bowel movement. It was factual; it had, he claimed, an Aristotelian unity since it was confined to toilets and it dealt with life and death. It was bad. So it is not so much the raw materials we deal with as it is, at times, the mastery of them that matters. And then I want to bring up that characteristic of the attention span of Americans. This is

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not to say that the ability to concentrate has been lost or damaged but to say that it has changed radically. It may be that the American reader can no longer, because of a variety of circumstances, concern himself with anything but fucking and espionage.

[Frederick] Exley calls collect from Florida where, having demolished a bar-room, he needs two hundred dollars bail.

In reading Nabokov I think I see, in the use of detail, a particular Russian idiom that cannot be imitated. I mean the use of signs, park benches, umbrella stands and mounted antlers, those things that seem to fly at the consciousness of a madman.

I have a letter from an editor at Doubleday who suggested that I title my next book: "Cultured Pearls and Other Imitations." How strange and angular that someone unknown to me should go to the trouble of writing such a letter.

I have a sore bum and slight indigestion which I garnish liberally with gin. 3 P.M. I read Camus and admire the set-piece landscapes as I do in Bellow, O'Connor, etc. There is a kind of brotherhood, it seems, in our love of the world and our determination to celebrate its shapes, reaches and colors.

Some arcane book-keeping at *The New Yorker* wherein I get eighty-three dollars for my last story.

An accounting from *The New Yorker*, three years after the fact, in which, through a simple misunderstanding, I lose seven thousand five hundred dollars.

Waking in the middle of the night I say: God Bless Hart

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Crane, God Bless Jim Agee, God Bless Virginia Woolf, God Bless Ernest Hemingway and God Bless William Faulkner.

1967–1969

Updike's cover story, and I quite sensibly envy his gifts. I defend myself by saying that he has developed an impractical degree of sensibility and that my own stubborn and sometimes idle prose has more usefulness. One does not ask, skating on a pond, how the dark sky carries its burden of starlight. I don't, in any case.

I read a novel on Saturday about a man whose wife keeps him in a cage. This extention of emotional reality into factual reality is persuasive but the cage is for me too much of a good thing.

I am entertained by a novel about Hollywood that lacks, I think, resonance. A history professor, a spry cocksman, takes his neurotic wife to Los Angeles. The lights, sounds and customs of that part of the world are put down directly and effectively but with nothing lyric or penetrating. His wife barely tolerates fucking and he picks up a waitress who lives in Venice. There is a well researched and interesting account of life there; and this brings up the importance of research and my inability to travel. Enter a psychiatrist, married to a movie actress. The historian screws the waitress all over the place. When the wife discovers this she gets screwed by the psychiatrist. The historian then screws the starlet. The wife, liberated by the psychiatrist's fucking – she comes three times to his once – dyes her hair orange and wears California clothes. The husband returns to the academic world of the east while she settles down in sin city.

He was the kind of writer who wrote for magazines and was, as a consequence, famous in doctors' and dentists' waiting rooms and barber shops.

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I read [Thornton] Wilder's novel [*The Eighth Day*] and while it is a pleasure to find someone his age in full possession of his faculties, I'm not quite sure what the value of his faculties is.

I read the Solzhenitsyn with pleasure and think that I will read until dawn as I did with Tolstoy forty years ago. Fortunately I have enough common sense to go to bed. It is forty years later. The book is not only an exhaustive indictment of Stalin's tyranny, his hired torturers and murderers, it seems to be an indictment of the backwardness of the Russian people. This is, I think, because Russian literature, in spite of the fifty year struggle for change, shows less organic growth and change than any other literature. We do not find characters out of [Laurence] Sterne and Trollope wandering into contemporary English literature but in this book the cruel and stupid bureaucrats are the same men we met in Pushkin and Gogol. That woman, writing with her finger on a steamy window, first appeared in [Mikhail] Lermontov. It is an intensely national literature, you might say provincial, literature so that descriptions of drunkenness and stupidity go beyond the character into the national character, the Russian people and the race. Some European sophistication seems to have rubbed off onto the aristocracy but today's Russians seem not only backwards, they seem determinedly so.

Independence day. I read, for the grants, some stories by a woman named [Joyce Carol] Oates who is extremely gifted and not terribly interesting.

In a review of Cocteau, prefaced by Ned [Rorem], there is a vigorous attack on the mirror image, so vigorous that I wonder if the writer isn't or wasn't a sufferer himself. I think of [Harold] Brodkey in St. Louis, falling in love with himself because there was no one else so intelligent handsome and rich in the neighborhood; and how bitter this marriage was. With what anger and disappointment he studied his face in

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the mirror like a man who sees across the dinner table that his wife's eyes are small and set too close, that her lips are thin and her teeth discolored. But I don't want to write this story.

In Mrs. Oates's novel the heroine takes a look at a gas pumper and begins to heave. They run off into the woods where she moans; Put it in way in, deeper, deeper, etc. I like to think of heterosexual love as a more complicated act.

I glance at a novel, published by Bernie about homosexual love. It is, like most of Bernie's books in no way provocative or pornographic. The incidence of homosexual intercourse is very high and the geography is explicit but it is very dull. Some practices that have mystified me are made clear. Excepting for the size of their cocks the two lovers have no traits at all. I can't tell one from the other. They are constantly unbuttoning one another's trousers which dates the book comically. Trouser buttons went out twenty years ago. They also travel on double-deck buses which went out with trouser buttons. I suppose the book was written that long ago. I think the ending was meant to be happy but I tossed the book into the incinerator so I can't check this morning.

A novel by a young man, the climax of which comes when he screws his mother-in-law while his wife is in labor. He also, now and then yanks his cock. Since Phil Roth has opened up these fields of athletics I suppose it will soon be crowded with young and old men with open flies, beating their wart-colored bones and squirting various quantities of juice onto the wallpaper. But candor is, of course, not all that is needed. Phil's self-abuse is brilliant. Yesterday's young man might just as well describe in detail the blowing of his nose. Is there anything to be said for euphemism.

I read Burroughs. I do not want to be self-righteous but this is, it seems to me, a venereal obsession close to madness.

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The street boy undresses, folding his clothes, and blows smoke into his pubic hair. A gluey substance drips from his swollen muscle. But I smell the bitter sweat that would fill the room; the stink of socks, nervousness and dirty underwear.

Great progress in this kind of writing has been made in the last few years while I persevere in trying to write a novel without a four-letter word. How much easier it could be. Donleavy, Miller, Mailer, Ginsberg, Roth, Updike, etc. some of the most important men we have are all writing about cocks and cunts and arseholes while I describe the summer dawn. The mystique of pornography is what I claim to be interested in—the sense that a prick drawn clumsily on a wall is a sign of great cheer. The intensity of sexual candor must be irresistible to most of us and I have, by way of footnotes, reveries, etc. described plenty of cocks but there is some dead end here—the great difference between a fantasy and a robust fuck or suck and I might, idly on this sunny morning, claim that I mean to declare this difference.

That the exploration of candor in writing does not seem to me a universal domain. There are in literature turning points or feats of discovery—Flaubert and Joyce—that seem universal, but sexual candor I think not. It is the mastery of men like Miller, Roth and Mailer that gives their work its power. These seem to be intimate and singular accomplishments. Now that Roth, not without assistance, has opened up the playing fields of masturbation we find the field thronged with incompetents who feel that self-abuse is, in itself, adventurous, comical and visionary. Phil's self-abuse is brilliant.

O'Hara, it seems, has written a story about a man, a general, who wears women's underwear and makes his wife dress like a sailor so that he can unbutton and screw her. Why? Because a fact is known and provable does not give it any moral reality or significance. This may be hypercritical and self-righteous.

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In the interview they ask why all my women characters are predatory sexual cranks and I might reply that this has been my experience; but much of the fault is mine. Why should I have engaged myself in such a relationship and have endured it for thirty-five years. Goodnight, I say, Goodnight, says she and by letting her voice trail manages to make this simple wish seem despairing and contemptuous.

I think I do not like the poetry of John Betjeman, a decision based on the knowledge of a half dozen poems and a newspaper article. I think he is unserious, uncommitted, I have ignoble suspicions about his virility, I think he is too much like Lear, without Lear's especial melancholy. But hearing the fine sound of the wind in the leaves I think that when I am cured I will write in a lighter and more natural way about the sound of the night wind in the leaves and damp country churches and bursts of light and the sound of bells; of things received easily. That I will escape the feeling of living in the center of a house whose rooms, one after the other, are being closed and locked to me.

A letter from Bill [William Maxwell], asking me to cut a story by two galleys. I go into a lasting rage. A short story is as precise as a poem and it cannot be slashed.

The two stories in the current *New Yorker* might be called surrealist. A man with diamond cufflinks and a ruby tiepin is frozen into a glacier. The narrator, a glider pilot, sees a woman running across a field in a wedding dress, holding her train, etc. In the second, Mummy is a doctor and something of a nut, a little like Oxencroft. There seems to be no other turn for them, the editors to take, publishing fiction in a magazine, so packed with distractions. I remember feeling that you had to show your bag of tricks in the opening paragraph, to hold the reader's attention. You come in half-dressed, holding a grand piano in one hand. How far they've gone from the dry accounts of the suburban husband pushing the screen door open at dusk and putting his wife's anniversary present on

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the kitchen table. Edith Wilcox stood at the door of their summer cottage, waiting for the children to return from their picnic. She drew a strand of light brown hair off her forehead, etc.

I read some Flaubert, hoping that this will get me back onto course as it may. I find the description of furnishings and women's clothing static but much of it is lambent, witty and beautiful. It is the sense, in every way, of a vision of life put down with an authority that makes it appear to be a force of comprehension. One seems for the length of the book not only to understand these lives but to understand as well the room where one sits, the telephone calls, the hash for supper.

Updike mentions me fleetingly and I am pleased.

The poet we have come to hear is, I guess, about forty. He seems to have lost an eye. His hair is long, newly-washed and it gleams in the light. He keeps it off his brow every few minutes by combing it upwards with his fingers. This is a variation of the horizontal gesture of Ben [Cheever]'s generation. His voice is not strong but his manner is easy, collected, he might be in his own living room, chain smoking, running his fingers upwards through his hair. I like some of the poetry although I, drunk and excitable, get impatient after an hour. It seems to me that he is given to listing names, to summoning a literary community. Allen Ginsberg, Gregory Corso, John Barth, Leslie Fiedler. Etc. On the way home I give an emotional and perhaps drunken description of the effect of the academic community on literature. They work, I say, within a community, writing prefaces for one another, reviewing one another's books, reading aloud to one another from the work in hand; and because of this (say I) they lack the tension and urgency that a writer (like me) must suffer and exploit. The note of desperation, loneliness, is never heard, etc. M. disputes this and when we get home Ben says that we are having a domestic quarrel, disguised as a literary discussion. It still snows and I wash down two Miltowns with a glass of whiskey.

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Donleavy's new novel is reviewed as sad, beautiful, bawdy and I worry about my own product. In fact I am jealous. I would like some financial and critical security; but then who wouldn't.

Three days in town for interviews.

A woman reporter tries to seduce me. I hope and pray that she won't be vindictive.

The usual Thursday collapse. 9:20. I read in the evening paper that DTs are precipitated when the alcoholic is denied his hootch. Brrr. [Robert] Gottlieb calls at four to say the first printing [of *The Stories of John Cheever*] is upped to forty-five thousand, fifty-five rather and that the B.O.M.C. advance is fifty thousand. So I am thirty thousand richer. Celebrate, he says, and I want to but M. takes the dog out for a walk and I don't seem to have any chums. I call S. but she is returning a wallpaper sample to a friend. I call S. but she is on her way to the shrink. I speed F. [Fred Cheever] into town where we buy two records. In the record store a negress is dancing and I am about to dance with her but I refrain. Good. Good.

In thinking of Eleanor [Clark] I could begin with the Rocca but I seem lazy, unenthusiastic and my mind keeps straying downstairs to the bottles in the pantry. I could do the splendor of the ruin, the grandeurs or grandness of the landscape and the rigorous life within the moats and walls. There was no running water and no potable water at all. You bathed out of a Renaissance well, hauling the water up in a marmalade tin. Beside the well was a pair of Roman columns. Fig trees and azaleas grew sometimes in the rooms and around the walls were lookouts of a Moorish cast. The setting was not romantic—it was much too deeply rooted in fact, much too massive and irreducible for this. The fortress in a sense belonged to Eleanor Clark. She had made the place habitable and summered there for many years, later with her husband

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and children. The combination of massive beauty and simplicity, the moorish lookouts and the cliffs of Ansedonia was Eleanor's setting. There are many others—of course—Rome, the Vermont ski trails, Normandy and Connecticut. The tranquility and the smallness of Porto Ercole ended with the arrival of the Queen of Holland followed by a large delegation of Italian nobility and presently Charlie Chaplin and the Radziwills. This was not Eleanor's setting and she left the Rocca for good.

During the summers there she wrote her book *Rome and a Villa*. In the masses of books written about Rome this remains a classic. Her scholarship is exacting, her knowledge of the city lyrical and intimate and grown, hard-headed men on finishing the book have been known to take the next plane to Fiumicino. These qualities of scholarship, lyricism and humor and deep intelligence characterize all of Eleanor's work. Eleanor is an exceptionally beautiful woman—a graceful athlete, a formidable linguist and a pleasant mother. I once, skiing with her in Italy, was so put out by her competence that I sulked in the bar. She now lives between her house in Fairfield and her house in Vermont. What else, what else. What else.

I've never been quite sure of my relationship here. He [Yevgeny Yevtushenko] is a prime celebrity and it sometimes seems, to a childish degree, that I'm trying to achieve some sort of fame at the end of his coattails. I've had fantasies in which we are photographed, traveling together, the Russian poet and the American writer—but I claim to be genuinely disinterested in this sort of thing. It is perhaps that I have never known anyone so conspicuously famous. And I sometimes think my love for him, my pleasure in his company, may be more ticklish than I have been willing to admit. When we embrace I am aware of the fact that we are being observed by a hundred people; that I am the one man in the room he will embrace; that I am the closest friend of the famous poet. This is all lamentable. I love him because he is brilliant, I

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also seem to love him because he is famous. There is the appalling possibility that this is narcissism. Oh well, I'll see him tomorrow and try to see it clearly.

Why must I tolerate so much odium in my affairs; meaningless of sexual antagonism. Oh why?

The club meets for lunch. T. is in one of his uncouth humors spar and parry. It's very funny. I do not mention Yevtushenko; after half an hour he turns to me and says angrily: All right, tell us all about Yevtushenko. So we walk in the woods.

Drive in town at five. Dinner at the Croyden. Another residential hotel. Mostly Europeans. Crowds around the Y. Maoists passing out anti-Yevtushenko pamphlets. Then Zhenya blows in, he wants to be alone. As he performs I find his face nearly indescribable. He seems tired, hungover, a little haggard. In the lights of the stage his yellow hair might be gray. There is the sharp, triangular nose, the wide blue eyes, the immense diversity of expression, anger and pleasure, the full use of his voice, his arms and his trunk. He is a great performer and I am as excited as a child. I do observe that, like [Yvor] Winters, he plays X against Y. Reavey says: I spent three hours with him this afternoon, but Reavey is not invited to the green room for a drink. With the exception of one night in Moscow when he turned it on full force I have never been sure of where I stand. I remain excited on the way home, sit in the diningroom waiting for my excitement to subside. I seem to have been overwhelmed. Then suddenly I suffer a paroxysm, drunken perhaps, of despair. I am nothing, I will never amount to anything. Make out in the morning, cook the breakfast, a brilliant day, all is well.

I declare a day of rest and rest. Reading Updike's autobiographical stories I admire their coherence and wonder why I can't face my own past calmly. Am I embarrassed by the soiled underpants hung from a nail driven into the bathroom door.

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When I complained about this I was slapped down. The gaslight on the backstairs, the unclean kitchen. It was a scene full of conflicts that I seem unable to resolve. How aristocratic you are Mrs. C., said our neighbor who could have bought and sold us with ease. Mother's sigh would be tremulous and her reply: There must be at least a drop of plebian blood in my veins. Do you know how I can tell. Because I love to wash dishes. A summer night. But it bores me.

Read Roth whose perspective I envy but I cannot imitate a Yiddish conversation style. He can slam broadly at his archetypal parents—push, ridicule—howl—but what can I do with an old lady in a three-cornered hat sitting in an ornate acolyte's chair lifted from the chancery of some abandoned church. At her feet there was a small suitcase and in the dark hallway—her own hung with her pictures—one keenly felt the anguish of travel, uprootedness. She seemed a refugee. I'm all ready, she said. That was obvious. She had probably been ready since dawn. Would you like a drink, she asked. I know what would happen if I said yes, please. She would go into a pantry for a moment and then return, smiling sadly. Your brother, she would say, has drunk all the whiskey.

Roth, towards the end, lets it run. M. [Mary] dislikes this and I keep my mouth shut. Here there is the beauty of an utter falsehood, that quality of belief that transcends disbelief. The house, the street where it stands, the characters of the two men who meet in the hall are all inventions and this is their power.

I think of George Orwell on waking.

Indian summer and these days come like prizes, seven in a row. Fog at dawn, and then the light, pure and angled, pours into the draw. I said to R. [Roth] that we have no vocabulary for a maple tree that has turned from green into orange and yellow. We stand before this simple phenomenon with our meta-

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phors and similes, our spectrum, down around our knees like some embarrassing condition of undress. So we walk on towards the firs which we are better equipped to admire, description being nothing else.

Mailer's book is praised and I remember thinking, years ago, that his line was more sinewy than mine, his intelligence much better informed and more comprehensive. That Mailer is alive and working is a provocation, a challenge, an excitement; but there is room for all kinds of fiction. I wish my work were more passionate, and I can struggle for this, but I am not intensely discontented with my limitations.

1974–1978

Reading my own stories is like some intensely unhappy relationship with a mirror. The work is done and to return to it seems idle in the strongest sense of the word—a demeaning sense of time squandered, of letting a splendid afternoon parade across the lawns without doing any work, without participating or celebrating in this parade.

I think I can mail this chapter today; so it will be today or tomorrow. If it turns out to be rubbish I would not be crushed. Nothing of any importance, really. I must remember not, like a drunk, to exploit these highs.

Praise be to thee Oh Lord. Of Thine own have we given Thee. I say this often and often feel it. I am a medium; and I mean to avoid the agony of Prometheus, Orpheus and Marsyas by closing my song with a pratfall. I think this is correct. I can discourse on my method or lack of method or what I know of my method but I do not do anything so scientific as play by ear. I merely strum. I think of Mrs. Trask with her numerous, white upright pianos being moved into whatever room she wished to fill with music. She must have been a great pianist, I said. Oh no, said Mr. Paul. All she could do was strum. By which I guess he meant that she would fumble

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for chords and resolutions that pleased her uneducated and I guess vulgar ear. This is very like me. I seem to have a little perspective on the affectation of prodigality, but not much. The piece in hand seems, at this moment, to be the heart of the book. But I'm not sure what the book is. I cannot state it in a sentence. So I would like to play by ear, to strum for another hundred pages. So today is a holiday. Do the tires, spade the garden.

I do prune the grapes and will today paint the iron and do the wisteria and the roses. I suffer an inconsequential interview and, after dinner, lacking TV, read Updike on Borges and Nabokov. I am grateful to John for having presented the masters so splendidly. I have not liked Borges but the quotation John gives leaves me feeling that the blind old man has an extraordinarily beautiful tone, a tone so beautiful that it can, quite gracefully, encompass death. And there is Nabokov who can be better than one thinks possible. This then is the thrill of writing, of playing on this team, the truly thrilling sense of this as an adventure, the hair, the grain of sand in one's mouth, the importance, but not at all selfishly, of this exploration—the density of the rain forest, the shyness of the venomous serpents, the resounding conviction that one will, tomorrow, find the dugout and the paddle and the river that flows past the delta to the sea. He also holds Proust up into the light.

On waking I do not quarrel, for a change, with the family, but quarrel with the world for the chance that John's novel may be celebrated and that mine may be an estimable failure or perhaps a flop. So I can bicycle and scythe my fields. While Mary and I danced in Leningrad she told me that he could not endure having a book of mine in his room; and Jean told me that Salinger could not eat if there was, in the room, the book of an estimable contemporary. So one has this to deal with and perhaps I knew it twenty years ago with Saul. I think I know it no more.

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Mary and John Cheever at the American Institute of Arts and Letters.

The telephone rings at four. This is CBS. John Updike has been in a fatal automobile accident. Do you care to comment. I am crying. I cannot sleep again. I think of joining Mary in bed but I am afraid she will send me away. I think I am right. When there is a little light I feed the dogs. I hope they don't expect to be fed this early every morning, she says. I do not point out that John will not die every morning and that in any case it is I who feeds them. The restraint costs me nothing. When I go into the kitchen for another cup of coffee she empties the pot into my cup and says: I was just about to have some myself. When I insist on sharing the coffee I am unsuccessful. I do not say that the pain of death is nothing compared to the pain of sharing a coffee pot with a peevish woman. This costs me nothing. And I see that what she seeks, much more than a cup of coffee—is to gratify a sense of denial and neglect—and that we so often, all of us, put our cranky and our emotional demands so far ahead of our hunger and thirst.

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As for John he was a man I so esteemed as a colleague and so loved as a friend that his loss is indescribable. He was a prince. I think it not difficult to kiss him goodbye—I can think of no other way of parting from him although he would, in my case, have been embarrassed. As a writer of his generation I think him peerless; and his gifts of communicating, to millions of strangers, his most exalted and desperate emotions was, in his case, fortified by immense and uncommon intelligence and erudition. John, quite alone in the field of aesthetics, remained shrewd. Mercifully there is no consolation in thinking that his extraordinary brilliance prophesied a cruel, untimely and unnatural death. His common sense would have dismissed this as repulsive and vulgar. One misses his brightness—one misses it painfully but one remembers that his life was dedicated to the description of enduring—and I definitely do not mean immortal—to enduring strains of sensuality and spiritual revelation.

So the call about John's untimely death was a fraud. I have decided, says my daughter, that it was an overambitious stringer who saw the name on a police blotter and tried to cash in.

Lying in bed, quite itchy, I see my work at its worst. I have been asking for this. I use light words like *very* and *terribly*, I find a sentence with four hyphens, I close a paragraph with a mousetrap declarative, my surface is greater than my depth. All this penetration is lost on waking.

So that lump is done and I read it to Jane and Paul [Bowles]. I could stay here and wrestle with the end but I get tense at twilight and haven't found a way out of this. At breakfast Tad speaks of my cough; a rich combination of alcohol, tobacco and old age. I write letters to one crippled youth, one ardent Christian, one student, one friend, one fan and one lover. I may have sold Dillon's book at the stable.

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I read some stories of mine. Their precision galls me; I seem always to be plugging at small targets. I hit them all right but why don't you get a 12-gauge double-barrel and go after bigger game. And the lack of genuine climax galls me too. I have been racked by a big orgasm as often as there are stars in heaven but I don't seem to get this down. However I think the stories an accomplishment.

Reading, I think that my work will provoke severe criticism and this seems (this morning) to be a mercy. I feel myself truly unloved. I am quite happy about this.

The thing about cummings and Yevtushenko and hundreds of other people whose names would mean nothing to you is that in their company—running for a bus or getting drunk—I have the excitement of participating in something meteoric—the pleasure of seeing a trace of white fire arc into the darkness with a grace and daring that had never before and would never again be seen. It is the thrill of risk and darkness and an arc or trajectory drawn in fire that will fade before the pursuit is consummated.

Mr. [Harold] Ross insisted on a degree of decorum. One could not, of course, use a word like *fuck*. One complained of course and published stories elsewhere but I, it seems, had my own concept of decorum and when Mr. Ross used the word *fuck* at the lunch table I would jump. Having noticed this Mr. Ross would, at lunch, throw a *fuck* in my direction now and then to watch me jump. He was, himself, not a decorous man, but he taught me that decorum can be a mode of language in our need to speak with one another and a language that having been learned was in no way constraining.

My lower intestine is dubious, but I feel much better. I go to Caldor to autograph books and think this morning that I feel better. The people are truly pleasant and I am reminded of the encyclopedia salesman in Saratoga. I sit at my table with my ashtray and my four felt pens and the strangers approach me shyly. The music has been discontinued and a voice

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announces that John Cheever, the famous best-seller is in the book department. I play the same role as those people who advertise hair-straighteners and magic silver polish. The customers and I are utter strangers. We smile wildly at one another and they ask if I think they will like the book. I say that I can't answer that but that it has been well-liked in this country as well as in Europe. We laugh. We blush. I sign a book. Here is that experience of intimacy I try so hard to explain. We are, in short, not alone. We are spiritually miles from the priest with his ciborium but the ritual is similar. The customer and I both hope he will enjoy what he has purchased. The air is cleared; we are both on our way. Their shyness is inestimable. "I only want to be esteemed," a woman asks me to write in a book. There is a shy young man with chin whiskers who can't look at me. When I ask his name he can't reply. He hangs at the edge of the crowd and every so often he buys another book. He buys four. The store closes down at nine and we go off to Chuck's Steak House where everyone drinks double vodka martinis but me. The manager recites an Elizabethan sonnet he has written about Jewish tailors. This is very serious. A very pleasant young man drives me back to the parking lot. I piss in the parking lot and drive home.

These mornings I should use the best of my energies to write the preface and the book. It would please me if the order in which these stories are published were reversed and I appeared first as an elderly man and not as a young man, who living in a furnished room somewhere in the village, came out shouting at the fact that irony was not a rhetorical term but a sensation, and in some cases a passion. I was nearly thirty when I was shocked to discover that genuinely decorous men and women admitted into their affairs both greed and hypocrisy. The parturition of a writer, I think, unlike that of a painter, is not subject to any interesting alliance with his masters. In the growth of a writer one finds nothing like the early Jackson Pollock drawings of the Sistine Chapel, with their cross references to Thomas Hart Benton. A writer can be seen clumsily learning to walk, to make love, to eat his peas with a fork.

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Cheever at home in Ossining.

1980–1981

On my notes for a speech I find that I describe myself as a traveler from the north. That sense of estrangement that seems to me to be perhaps at the heart of literature—that persuasion—quite unspoken as I understand it—that we have seen other worlds than this and will see strange worlds to come.

It is the old, old man, not I, who in addressing the gentle reader will think himself to be addressing a beautiful and vanishing population. It is he, not I, who claims to be familiar with their intelligence, their exalted aspirations and their dreadful loneliness. It is his taste for twilight and vanishing things in general I expect that accounts for this fastidious and sentimental vision of the robust reading public. He claims to know, from the letters they write that they live on low digit postal routes with low digit P.O. boxes. Some of them, he knows for a fact, live in snow-buried hamlets outside of cities

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like Tallinin and Leningrad. He has sat on the floors of their houses in places like Tokyo and Peking and eaten their dinners with chopsticks although he always asked for a fork and sometimes traveled with one in his pocket. Would he travel through the Orient with a fork in his pocket? What I mean to say is that his regard for the reading public is tearful. They seem to him threatened by that mysterious obsolescence that is invented by cowards to threaten all virtue and beauty.

I finish the Roth and it is his last novel and the one with the happy ending. That his old father should bring him a collection of silver medals that can be handled only with gloves has for me the freshness of imagination that is one of the most beautiful and important qualities of story-telling.

There is a story by Virginia Woolf who describes an intelligent, perceptive and gifted observer assessing the inferior life of a traveling companion and being left, as I recall, with her penetrating and useless assessments while the passenger is greeted by lovers and friends. I remember drinking to take the train, perhaps twenty years ago, seeking traveling companions with whom I could chat, hurling myself into the beauties of the landscape or telling myself stories. And I in this connection—the importance of fiction we have that observation of Thorax, the famous hangman at Bailey Prison in the early nineteenth century, who on questioning those who were about to be hung found that while many of them were saying their prayers, an even larger number of them were telling themselves stories. To exaggerate, perhaps, the importance of fiction, the short story might be described as something one tells oneself on the way to the gallows.

I had a dream that a brilliant reviewer pointed out that there was an excess of lamentation in my work. I had, fleetingly, this morning, a sense of the world, one's life, one's friends and lovers as a given. Here it all is, comprehensible, lovely, a sort of paradise. That this will be taken quite as swiftly as it has been given is difficult to remember.

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Ezra Pound



Confession

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The following document, obtained some years back by David Horton under the Freedom of Information Act, constitutes the "confession" made by Ezra Pound to FBI Special Agent Frank Amprim in Genoa on May 7, 1945. Published here in its entirety for the first time (a few extracts appeared in the Australian magazine Helix *in 1983), this confession essentially confirms the accounts of Pound's wartime broadcasting activities given in C. David Heymann's* Ezra Pound: The Last Rower *(1976), Humphrey Carpenter's* A Serious Character: The Life of Ezra Pound *(1988) and Tim Redman's study of* Ezra Pound and Italian Fascism *(1991). The interest of this document therefore lies less in the information it divulges than in the simple fact that here, for the first and only time, Ezra Pound was able to give U.S. government authorities his* own *version of the acts and events that had led to his indictment for radio treason in 1943. The typed confession is initialled on each of its six pages and signed at the end. Pound's occasional handwritten emmendations are represented here in italics and within brackets.*

At his subsequent trial in Washington, D.C., whether by his own free will or under the suasion of his lawyer, Pound stood mute before Judge Botha Laws in Federal District Court on November 27, 1945. This act of silence, legally construed as a plea of not guilty and at the same time as evidence of Pound's mental incompetence to stand trial, set into motion the juridicial and psychiatric machinery that would keep him interned at St. Elizabeths Hospital for the next thirteen years.

In May, 1945, however, as this confession shows, Pound was only all too willing to talk. Aware that he was under indictment for treason, he nonetheless made every effort to turn himself in to the American authorities, convinced he would be cleared of all charges. After an initial unsuccessful attempt to contact American officials in Rapallo on May 2, Pound was arrested by local partigiani *the following day, but*

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was released as being of little consequence to them. He then demanded to be taken to the U.S. command post at Lavagna, where he was transferred to the American Counter Intelligence Center (CIC) in Genoa. Here, between May 5 and May 8 Pound was interrogated by Special Agent Amprim, who had been dispatched from Rome to handle the case. A U.S. Army photo of the period shows Pound and Amprim sitting together on a couch, the young agent holding pencil and notepad in hand and gazing intently at his eminent prisoner, while the elder poet leans back on the sofa, legs crossed in an air of cocky confabulation, jabbing an index finger at his knee to hammer a point home.

*Pound apparently trusted Amprim's patient, amiable manner and talked freely of his activities as a writer and broadcaster for the EIAR (*Ente Italiana Audizione Radiofoniche*) between 1940 and 1943, as well as his subsequent radio work and publishing activities for the short-lived Fascist Republic of Salò from late 1943 through early 1945. In addition to eliciting some six official "statements," "outlines" and "further points" from their prisoner in the CIC Genoa Headquarters between May 6 and May 8, Amprim and his assistants also seized Pound's Everest portable typewriter and some seven thousand pages of evidence from his nearby home in Sant' Ambrogio (although at least one legal expert, Conrad Rushing, has opined that none of this evidence would have been admissible in court, since its seizure was unlawful under the Fourth Amendment). Pound, however, was duly impressed by the efficiency of the investigation; he later told his lawyers that Amprim and his colleagues had "with great care collected far more proof . . . than I or any private lawyer could have got at." "My instinct all along," he said at the period, "has been to leave the whole matter to the U.S. Department of Justice, the good faith of whose agent I have no reason to doubt."*

A similar confidence informs the penultimate paragraph of this signed "confession" of May 7, 1945: "I am willing to return to the United States to stand trial on the charge of Treason against the United States. I will admit the contents of this

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statement in open court since this statement is the truth." Pound's line of defense was the same one he had outlined in a letter to Attorney General Francis Biddle when first informed of his indictment for treason in 1943, namely, that he had merely been exercising his constitutionally guaranteed First Amendment right of free speech, that the terms on which he had spoken over the Italian radio were that he should not be asked to say anything contrary to his own conscience or duties as an American citizen, that he had not spoken to the American troops or suggested that they mutiny or revolt, and that, although he had received payments from the Italian Ministry of Popular Culture, he had never at any point been an official member of the Fascist party. To the anti-Semitic vituperations of his broadcasts (despicable, but not, legally speaking, a treasonable offense), his "confession" remains morally blind: Pound merely refers blandly to his attacks on "the International Financiers of New York and elsewhere" who had "plotted to 'drag' the United States into the present war," adding that "I think my talks were giving pain to the worst *enemies of the U.S.A."*

Pound remained in custody at the Genoa CIC Headquarters for three weeks, from May 3 to May 24, in legal limbo yet still sanguine about facing trial back home. Toward the end of the month, for reasons that remain unclear, word came from the War Department in Washington that he was to be transferred to the Army Disciplinary Training Center in Pisa ("Exercise utmost security measures to prevent escape or suicide. No press interviews authorized. Accord no preferential treatment."). When, after nearly six months in captivity in Pisa, Pound was finally flown back to Washington D.C. and brought before Judge Laws on November 19 for preliminary arraignment, he announced in court that he wished to act as his own counsel. Informed that the charge of treason was too serious for him to argue his own defense, he agreed to have the court appoint an attorney to represent him.

From this point on, Pound basically lost all voice over his fate: it was now his lawyer, Julien Cornell, and various psychi-

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atric experts who would speak for *him and* of *him before the law. Cornell, sensitive to the considerable public animus against Pound but insufficiently aware of the numerous legal loopholes in the government's case (which, even according to a confidential internal Justice Department memorandum, was shaky) decided the safest course would be an insanity defense. Cornell's own account of the interview in which he suggested that Pound stand mute at his trial is eloquent: "When I asked him whether he wanted to stand mute or would prefer to enter a plea, he was unable to answer me. His mouth opened once or twice as if to speak, but no words came out. He looked up at the ceiling and his face began to twitch. Finally he said he felt ill and asked if he could not go back to the infirmary." A mouth opening to emit no words, a voice caught in a double bind of its own devising: a prefiguration, perhaps, of Pound's final silence.* Tempus loquendi, tempus tacendi.

—**Richard Sieburth**

May 7, 1945
Genoa, Italy

I make the following statement to RAMON ARRIZABALAGA and FRANK L. AMPRIM. Ramon Arrizabalaga has identified himself to be an Agent of the Counter Intelligence Corps of the 92nd Division of the United States Army; Frank Amprim has identified himself as a Special Agent of the Federal Bureau of Investigation of the United States of America. No threats or promises of any kind or nature have been made to me by anyone either directly or indirectly, and I have been advised also that this statement can be used against me in a court of law.

My full name is EZRA LOOMIS POUND. I am an American citizen. I have never renounced my citizenship. I was born at Hailey, Idaho, United States, on October 30, 1885. I lived

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in the United States until 1908, when I moved to London, England, where I lived until 1920, doing free lance writing. From 1920 to 1924, I lived in Paris, France, where I composed the opera "Villon," and wrote art and music reviews. In 1924, I moved to Rapallo, Italy, where I lived until May of 1944, when I was forced by military order to evacuate my home, and I moved to SANTA AMBROGIO 60, which is my present address.

While living in Europe, I had visited Italy often, and after the last War, I noticed the Fascist renewal or rejuvenation of the Country. My wife and I subscribed 25,000 lire each to the first loan of the littorio but I cannot remember the date. My purpose was to give Mussolini a "square deal" by pointing out his good work. About 1929, I had an audience with BENITO MUSSOLINI, who knew my book "GUIDO CAVALCANTI," which I had presented to him the year before. He expected me to talk about my book, but I [*took a very strong questionnaire to him*] explained my economic theories to him.

About 1929, I granted an interview to one FRANCO MONOTTI of the newspaper "LAVORO FASCITA." In this interview I stated that England was dead and the corpses were lying about in the streets; that France was dead but had the decency to bury the dead; that Italy was the only Country of the three where any vital activity was taking place.

About 1935, [*was*] I had published my book "JEFFERSON and MUSSOLINI." In this book I pointed out that Fascism was Mussolini's "New Deal" for Italy, contrasting his method with Jefferson's.

I finally made contact with the Italian Ministry of Popular Culture, ALESSANDRO PAVOLINI. I handed him a list of five points. He said that he was not as interested in any of the other points as in the fifth point, which was a suggestion that I talk over the Italian Radio to the American people for the purpose of pointing out the fine work which Mussolini had done in Italy.

In the Spring of 1940 I was invited to come to Rome to

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discuss my proposition of broadcasting over the Italian Radio by Mr. INTERLANDI and later by Mr. PARESCE of the Italian Ministry of Popular Culture. I came to Rome during the Spring of 1940 and saw PARESCE and asked him if I could broadcast to the American and English Peoples over the Italian Radio. I was finally allowed to give two broadcasts per week to the United States and one broadcast per week to England. No written contract was entered into.

I began broadcasting in person over the Italian Radio about the Summer of 1940. I constantly fought for more time on the Air in order to get my ideal across to the American and English Peoples. At first, for a very brief time, I used to speak directly over the Air, but on one occasion during 1940 I made some remarks at the end of my talk, [*not on the script*] simply a repeat of a main point, and after that incident I was ordered by PARESCE to record my talks on a disc, and this disc would be rebroadcast over the Air.

For the broadcasts made by me either directly or by disc, in my voice, I received three hundred and fifty lire, and for the articles read over the Air by someone else I received three hundred lire. This money was paid to me from the Summer of 1940 to the Summer of 1943 by the Italian Ministry of Popular Culture, which was part of the Italian Fascist Government. The Ministry of Popular Culture would authorise the Italian Accounting Office to send a so-called "MANDATO" to me by mail to Rapallo, Italy, where I was living. I would then take the "mandato" to the Italian Tax Office at Rapallo where I would sign a receipt and receive the amount called for in the "mandato."

During 1942 and the first half of 1943, at Rapallo, I would write about twenty or twenty-one radio manuscripts or talks, and then I would go to Rome where I visited the registration room of the ENTE ITALIANA AUDIZIONE RADIOFONICHE and make discs for rebroadcasts of my talks. I usually remained in Rome about three weeks, making three recordings per day. I made these recordings only after my manuscripts had been approved by Mr. UNGERO, sub-head of the Radio

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Section of the Italian Ministry of Popular Culture. The Italian Ministry of Popular Culture may have copies of the manuscripts used by me in making discs for my radio talks.

During 1942 and 1943, I used to make a broadcast by means of discs about three or four times every week. The broadcasts were managed and sponsored by the Ministry of Popular Culture, but went out over EIAR at Rome. The EIAR was an independent private firm, [*semi government control*].

Some of the aforesaid broadcasts were made in my name. I would come on the Air with the introduction "EUROPE CALLING—EZRA POUND SPEAKING."

During 1942, I invented a fictitious character called "AMERICAN IMPERIALIST." So far as I know, I wrote all the broadcasts made under my name of "American Imperialist." Various people read over the air the articles which I wrote under the name "American Imperialist." I think that Prince RANIERI SAN FAUSTINO may have read or announced some of them over the Air.

During 1942 and 1943, I wrote, also, brief items and "wise cracks" for a feature known as "News From Nowhere." This feature was dedicated to ridiculing English news broadcasts.

During 1942 and 1943 some of the recordings I made for the Italian Ministry of Popular Culture were sent to Berlin, Germany, and broadcast over the German Radio. Only a few were so sent.

Much of my business during 1942 and 1943 with the Italian Ministry of Popular Culture was conducted with ADRIANO UNGERO, subhead of the Radio Section of the Italian Ministry of Popular Culture.

The last broadcast over the EIAR made in my voice was made on July 25, 1943. I recall the date vividly. I was listening to my talk while at my home in Rapallo. A few minutes after my talk had concluded, there came over the radio the announcement that Mussolini had been overthrown and Marshall BADOGLIO had taken over the Italian Government. I then ceased broadcasting over EIAR because the Badoglio Govern-

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ment "kicked me out." However, between July and September of 1943, I sent to Prince RANIERI SAN FAUSTINO of the Italian Ministry of Popular Culture at Rome four or five radio talks under the name of "PIERO MAZDA." He had them read over EIAR. These talks were similar to my previous talks in which I had attacked President FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT and the International Financiers in America and elsewhere who had dragged the United States into the present War. I probably received three hundred lire for each of these talks which I had written under the name of "Piero Mazda."

After Badoglio became head of the Italian Government I went to Rome to see what was going on, about August 1, 1943 and soon returned to Rapallo. I returned to Rome about September 6, 1943, and saw someone whom I believe to have been AMILCARE ROSSI, former Italian Ambassador to the United States, and asked him to talk over EIAR to the American People to ask the American Army to cease bombing churches and babies, in Italy. He told me it would do no good.

On September 10, 1943, I walked from Rome to Rieti and then by train went to the Tyrol, and then to Rapallo.

During the Autumn of 1943, some of the Fascists formed a new Party in Northern Italy, and ALESSANDRO PAVOLINI went to Germany and named himself Secretary of the new Party, which eventually became the Fascist Republican Government. Later I wrote to Pavolini and he invited me to come North if I could get there, and I accepted. At Salo, I could not see Pavolini, but I saw FERNANDO MEZZASOMA, who had become head of the Ministry of Popular Culture in the Republican Fascist Government. Mezzasoma let me go to Milan since I told him that even if Italy fell I must go on with my own economic propaganda, that is, my fight for observance of the money clause in the United States Constitution which my grandfather had fought for in 1878, saying the same things I was saying.

I went to Milano on a cattle truck, and found the Republican

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Fascist Radio in disorder, with few honest men wanting a Radio Station and the "wise guys" sabotaging, and none of them being free from German control. The Germans censored all programs. In Rome I had met one CARL GOEDEL who was in the English section of EIAR during 1942 and 1943. I again met Goedel on this visit to Milan, and one of his officials gave me three thousand lire toward expenses. At Milan I refused to broadcast to American troops and no pressure was put on me. I then returned to Rapallo.

From about May to September of 1944, I sent items to the Republican Fascist Radio at Milano. When I wanted my name known or used, these items were written in the form of an interview with me. However my main work from this time on was writing and advising the CASA EDITRICE EDIZIONE POPOLARE of Venice, which publishing firm printed my version of the CHUNG YUNG of CONFUCIUS and my pamphlets on economic history. I also wrote articles on economics for "rebel papers in smaller towns," which articles were excluded from the larger press.

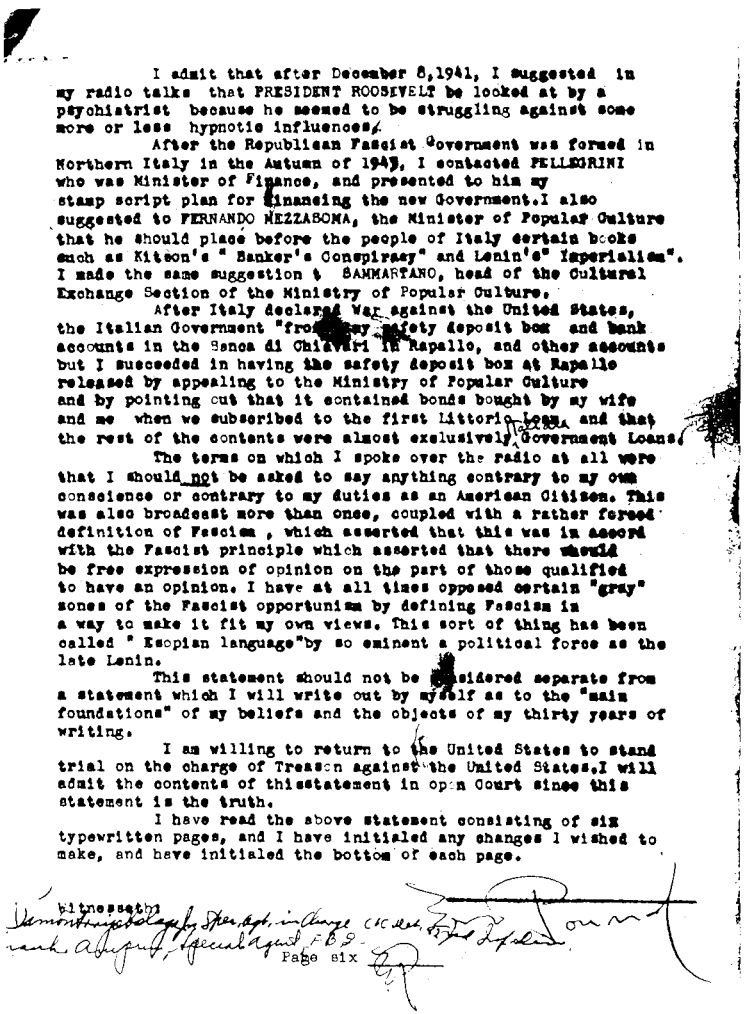
About September of 1944, I began sending short items to Carl Goedel at Milan. The items sent to Goedel and those sent to the Republican Fascist Radio at Milano were along the same lines as my radio talks of 1942 and 1943.

Through the Republican Fascist Accounting Office the Ministry of Popular Culture of the Republican Fascist Government used to send me about eight thousand lire [*about $80*] per month by mail from Venice. The last item I sent to Goedel was about three weeks ago, and there may be a check for me in payment in the mails somewhere between Venice and Rapallo. I never heard any of the items that I sent to Goedel over the Air. The last information was "Goedel uses your stuff in his own way." [*The Casa Editrice Edizione Popolare was part of the Ministry work, working for the department of Cultural Exchanges (Scambi Culturali). There was no increase in the monthly cheque because of the radio items.*]

About a year ago the Republican Fascist Ministry of Popular Culture sent me an employment application to fill out, but

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I declined to return it. They would keep sending me statements "enclosed is your salary for the month," and I would cross out these words and insert the words "for services rendered." I always accepted the checks which they sent me. These checks were drawn on the Banco di Chiavari in Rapallo. The last



I admit that after December 8,1941, I suggested in my radio talks that PRESIDENT ROOSEVELT be looked at by a psychiatrist because he seemed to be struggling against some more or less hypnotic influences.

After the Republican Fascist Government was formed in Northern Italy in the Autumn of 1943, I contacted PELLEGRINI who was Minister of Finance, and presented to him my stamp script plan for financing the new Government. I also suggested to FERNANDO MEZZASOMA, the Minister of Popular Culture that he should place before the people of Italy certain books such as Kitson's " Banker's Conspiracy" and Lenin's" Imperialism". I made the same suggestion t SAMMARTANO, head of the Cultural Exchange Section of the Ministry of Popular Culture.

After Italy declared War against the United States, the Italian Government "froze" my safety deposit box and bank accounts in the Banca di Chiavari in Rapallo, and other accounts but I succeeded in having the safety deposit box at Rapallo released by appealing to the Ministry of Popular Culture and by pointing out that it contained bonds bought by my wife and me when we subscribed to the first Littorio loan, and that the rest of the contents were almost exclusively Government Loans.

The terms on which I spoke over the radio at all were that I should not be asked to say anything contrary to my own conscience or contrary to my duties as an American Citizen. This was also broadcast more than once, coupled with a rather forced definition of Fascism , which asserted that this was in accord with the Fascist principle which asserted that there should be free expression of opinion on the part of those qualified to have an opinion. I have at all times opposed certain "gray" zones of the Fascist opportunism by defining Fascism in a way to make it fit my own views. This sort of thing has been called " Esopian language"by so eminent a political force as the late Lenin.

This statement should not be considered separate from a statement which I will write out by myself as to the "main foundations" of my beliefs and the objects of my thirty years of writing.

I am willing to return to the United States to stand trial on the charge of Treason against the United States. I will admit the contents of this statement in open Court since this statement is the truth.

I have read the above statement consisting of six typewritten pages, and I have initialed any changes I wished to make, and have initialed the bottom of each page.

Witnessed:

Page six

The final page of Ezra Pound's typed, annotated, initialed and signed confession.

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check that I received from the Republican Fascist Ministry of Popular Culture was in March of 1945. I recall that during 1944 I received from the Republican Fascist Ministry of Popular Culture a bonus which raised my monthly pay check to about eleven thousand lire. Early in 1945, I received a ten per cent cut in my monthly pay check because of a general salary cut.

I always sent two copies of my articles to Goedel. One copy I addressed to Carl Goedel at the German Consulate at Milano, and the other I addressed to Carl Goedel at 24 Piazza Castello, Milan, Italy. I suppose that Goedel wanted copies of my work for record and censorship. I did not work for Goedel, but for the Republican Fascist Ministry of Popular Culture.

From about 1929 to July of 1943, I received annually from the Italian Ministry of Communications a Foreign Journalists Railroad Pass at seventy per cent discount for eight trips a year.

I believe that I was justified in continuing to criticize President FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT after the United States entered the War in December of 1941.

I admit that during my broadcasts in 1942 and 1943 over EIAR I charged that the International Financiers of New York and elsewhere plotted to "drag" the United States into the present War.

During 1942, I became a member of the Committee for Malta, which had its headquarters in Rome, and which sponsored the independence of Malta. The British Empire was such a "goddam stink." I never was a member of the Fascist Party, but used to give the Fascist salute occasionally.

After the Italian Fascist Government declared War against the United States, I pointed out over EIAR in my radio talks that the United States was getting into a "whale of a debt," and should get out of the War immediately. I was making a test case for the freedom of speech. I think "my talks were giving pain to the *worst* enemies of the U.S.A."

No one ever suggested to me what I should say over the radio during 1942 and 1943 or at any other time. All talks were my own ideas, and I was at no time coerced by anyone in anyway either directly or indirectly.

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I admit that after December 8, 1941, I suggested in my radio talks that PRESIDENT ROOSEVELT be looked at by a psychiatrist because he seemed to be struggling against some more or less hypnotic influences.

After the Republican Fascist Government was formed in Northern Italy in the Autumn of 1943, I contacted PELLEGRINI who was Minister of Finance, and presented to him my stamp script plan for financing the new Government. I also suggested to FERNANDO MEZZASOMA, the Minister of Popular Culture that he should place before the people of Italy certain books such as Kitson's "Banker's Conspiracy" and Lenin's "Imperialism." I made the same suggestion to SAMMARTANO, head of the Cultural Exchange Section of the Ministry of Popular Culture.

After Italy declared War against the United States, the Italian Government "froze my safety deposit box and bank accounts in the Banca di Chiavari in Rapallo, and other accounts but I succeeded in having the safety deposit box at Rapallo released by appealing to the Ministry of Popular Culture and by pointing out that it contained bonds bought by my wife and me when we subscribed to the first Littorio Loan and that the rest of the contents were almost exclusively Government Loans.

The terms on which I spoke over the radio at all were that I should not be asked to say anything contrary to my own conscience or contrary to my duties as an American Citizen. This was also broadcast more than once, coupled with a rather forced definition of Fascism, which asserted that this was in accord with the Fascist principle which asserted that there would be free expression of opinion on the part of those qualified to have an opinion. I have at all times opposed certain "gray" zones of the Fascist opportunism by defining Fascism in a way to make it fit with my own views. This sort of thing has been called "Esopian language" by so eminent a political force as the late Lenin.

This statement should not be considered separate from a statement which I will write out by myself as to the "main

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foundations" of my beliefs and the objects of my thirty years of writing.

I am willing to return to the United States to stand trial on the charge of Treason against the United States. I will admit the contents of this statement in open Court since this statement is the truth.

I have read the above statement consisting of six typewritten pages, and I have initialed any changes I wished to make, and have initialed the bottom of each page.

Ezra Pound

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James Galvin

Indirective

The ridge road takes the ridgespine every way
It turns. It threads the granite vertebrae
And old, wind-dwarfed ponderosas that twist
Out of the ungiving, unforgiving ground
Like tips of auger bits drilled through from Hell.
Here, all trees die by lightning soon or late.
This hidden side-trail elk hunters found will fall
To their camp on Sheep Creek, where the creek stops them.
They ignite their Colemans, dress the carcasses,
Make drunk display in artificial light.
Years past the road kept going, forded there.
Now the creek has cut and caved the bank.
You have to go on horseback or afoot.
Well, just as well. Afoot or horseback was
The only way to go before the road,
Before the reason for the road arrived,
Disguised as some old trapper, moonshiner,
Xenophobe, or who the hell he was—
Old badger, anyway, who cleared some trees,
Cut some sidehill and creekbank with a slip
And mule to get a wagon way in there
With stores to keep him winterlong and when
The water rose too high to ford, Lord knows.
I said I'd take you there but I don't know.
More than likely I'll just get us lost.
The last time I tried to find the old homestead
I poked around for it awhile and then
Rode on to look for some of Richard's strays.
I never saw a cow that day either.
But I'll take you up and we can look
If your heart's set on it. The only time

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I saw the place myself I was with Ray.
Well, now Ray's dead, but he knew where it was.
Back then you could still drive there four-wheel drive,
Before the crossing disappeared. Even
Then the bank was steep for Ray's old Scout.
We lost the clutch, but Ray still got us there.
The nearby spring doesn't give it away,
Popping out like it does from solid
Rock, where even willows will not grow,
And diving underground before you know it,
As if it didn't like it here above.
What it looks like, in case we come up empty,
It looks small, just part of the woods, but small,
The cabin I mean, its logs obscured by brush.
It's dwarfed by the size of trunks surrounding it.
Deep snow country grows big trees. They vault
And loom in shadowed unconcern. The cabin
Is squalid, yes, but mostly it looks dim,
Or maybe brief would be the way to say it—
Depressing brevity we recognize
As squalor. Not much sun in woods like those,
None inside the windowless log shack.
Let's touch our horses up across this park.
That grove yonder might just be the one.
That time I came up here with Ray, God rest,
The time we found the place—it's only six
Or seven logs in height and ten feet square—
The door was ajar and stingy with its dark.
I noticed that before I saw the roof
Caved in, which made that depth of dark seem strange.
It kind of chilled me when we found the spine
Of something human-sized right by the door.
Ray mentioned, *There's no need to close the door*
Behind you if you're going out to die.
It was half-buried. I'm not saying it
Was a man, just that it could have been.
I wouldn't know a spine of bear from man

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Or woman, would you? I'll be damned. We're here.
It all looks just the same. The spine is gone.
What's that? A skull, sure as hell, half-buried,
Or half-unburied, like a blind white eye
In the ground. Relax. It isn't human.
More like an old badger. See the teeth? Here
The only human bones are yours and mine.

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Lucie Brock-Broido

And Wylde for to Hold

On the chine of the first white inkling of the winter
The Ravenmaster wraps his limbs in combs of wind.

It is November; the tower closes down
For night. He is wont to dwell on

Bridles, stars, medieval presaging. I will be ringed
At ankle, am a corvid thing.

Ruin is formal.
Metal, tether, one good name.

Virgin wool still with the body's oils keeps the cold, an augury.
A man who lives in a circular stair keeps watch.

The lighthouse I let go of, as a girl.
Since in your hand you seek to tame

Me, ravening, am wont to salt my own—
My will be done.

He breeds the bird to clip its wings.
Form is mortal & habitual.

As for my own limbs which are flightless
As a fortress knuckled to the earth,

As for my Own—I am scoured.
Ask others, whether I do lie.

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Lack of water, lack of light,
Lack of heat, lack of bedding, I should go

On this way forever; it is my wont to go.
Tonight—the wind will be high in its scaffolding,

On the strength. I will listen for its habit
Especially about the throat like an Elizabethan cuff

At the crude nest of the mouth. Our bed
Will be lined with shredded bark from sycamore & hair.

Let them lie broad awake in their nest, scissoring.
None will fly.

As for my own—I will line my speech
Like the seven mottled & pale

Eggs, incubating, after being held Round
So long. None will fly.

And wild to hold,
And wild to speak,

And wild to ruin,
And wild to tame.

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Three Poems by James Longenbach

A Brief History of Landscape Painting in France

Take Antoine Guillemet instead.
  When he was following that dirty gang
    I thought we lost him. Blinding poppies,

Far too many of them—even
  Daubigny encourages this man
    Who says he learned the ruse from me,

Rebellion, mixing paint with knives.
  By '95 those days were gone.
    New confidence, a new repose:

Soon I was born a little past
  The celebrations on the Champ de Mars.
    Now who can recognize himself?

Knowledge of depth, great atmospheres—
  They frighten me; at Argenteuil
    The chimneys glisten in the Seine

Like rows of poplars. Recently
  I understood your Delacroix
    And you insist this Monet looks

Toward me?—then step outside.
  It's logical to start with the sky.
    Look up: how many different ways

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Can two hands animate a cloud?
  At twenty-five I never craned
    My neck but understood them all.

In Italy, where every site
  Recalls and every monument
    Awakes a memory, the rumor is

I started something. Now the view
  Is overrun with young men packing
    Easels on their backs—as if

Their recollections weren't made
  By old men sizing up St. Peter's
    From the fountain of the French Academy.

I followed Poussin, found the scene
  Exactly as he painted it:
    The oval basin, the dome beyond,

And water like the mirror of a sky
  We wouldn't dare to look upon.
    I hear that Venice may be safe.

They're looking now. At the Palazzo
  Rezzonico no one could pretend
    To catch the water unaware.

Take Antoine Guillemet instead.
  You've heard? The laugh's on me:
    They say Corot has painted two,

Three thousand canvases, first Rome,
  Then Fontainebleau, five thousand
    Of them hanging in America.

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Stories Told about the Natural World

Two ospreys stir the branches over our heads
And circle the wide water. Cormorants,
The year's first mackerel running in the weeds.
Below the house, the dock's collapsed in mud,
Pilings snapped by one unnatural tide.
The few pines left across the cove preside
In black against the scorched peninsula.

Here, from these rocks, we watch waves turning
Softly like the child to come; the ospreys,
Talons clenched, land gently on their nest,
The cormorants returning, now in rows.
But I'm adrift, back to the blackened pines.

Even if the floods could rise, the flames
Were never wild enough to reach us here—
And yet an image floats across the water, white
As ash: I think of Baudelaire's rogue swan,
Webbed feet clumsy on the cobblestones,
Its beak poked raw. I think of those
Who lose what never can be found again,
The natural world incinerated
To the rocks we sit on, nothing more.

The ospreys glide with one eye on the nest,
Then slash the air, and like a sledge on wood,
They hit the surface of the water, each,
A silver muscle churning in their talons
As the bodies rise together to the trees.

Somewhere, even while we sleep, the world
Is measuring our share of happiness,
And everything that's born is nurtured
By the debts of lifetimes spent:
Untended, forest fires thresh these pines,

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And open floods rejuvenate the soil;
This scruff of feathers grows to be a swan—
A salmon spawns, the young survive. We've learned
These stories told about the natural world,
And soon, dissatisfied, we'll pass them on.

After Horace

Dark vines snaking the hillside where
The Sabines lived, where everything slants,
  Where a village clings to the hill
    As if retreating from a fire.

Where the road's still winding deep
In the wood until it disappears:
  No gate, no keeper, but a path
    Edged neatly with white polished stones.

All lost—the garden and the mask
Of Silenus, mosaics of colored glass,
  The fountain's mouth and bones of Christians
    Bleached by centuries of light.

But still the steep, unbroken hills
Around us and the fields below,
  And here the clearing where the wolf
    Once strayed to overhear the song.

Where the path still rises higher
Toward the scent of wintergreen,
  Where the rock divides among the mosses
    And the myrtle weaves its crown.

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And now the moment when the valley
Fills with the silence of the Sybil,
  When swallows dart into the chasm,
    Turning once, to reappear.

Remember here the modest gift of wine,
The goat's blood, red in icy water
  Pouring gently from a cleft in stone
    As from an urn tipped carefully

So you can cup your hand beneath
Its flow—now drink, and in its music
  Hear the source of its own praise:
    The clear-voiced spring of Bandalusia.

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Three Poems by John Harvey

The Battle of Anghiari

Leonardo da Vinci thought that you must make
the conquered beaten and pale, sides of the nose
wrinkled in bridges from nostrils to eyes,
brows raised. *Someone must be disarmed*, he said.
While working on the pained, twisted bodies

for "The Battle of Anghiari" he wrote, *Take a diligent view.*
At a bus stop I heard a woman call a man a "little shit"
and at first it was funny, the man hunched over
tying his shoe. But she didn't stop.

She called him an ass, then a viper, she turned
and said to me, someone indifferent to her,
that he was lost, was dying and wouldn't
get it over with, was hanging on and living,
even riding the bus with her for spite,

just for spite, she kept repeating those words
as I turned away and walked down Main.
I admired the woman. She kept the shape and color
of her hostility. Da Vinci would have studied

the man's body, palm up as if to ward off blows.
It's funny, the man kept on tying his shoes.
They must have repeated this dumb show
for many others, each time the woman yelling,
each time the man tying his shoes.

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The Persian War after Marathon

for Lucy Logsdon

She hears the story again, and this time, instead of feigning
interest,
instead of placing the right amount of incredulity in her voice,
she hangs up when the caller says everyone is vulnerable,

don't be surprised it happened to you. For weeks people she
hardly knows
have called her, some up front with purpose and names, others
secretive about meaning. The story she's told varies in small
details

but the themes are abuse, deceit, manipulation, no matter
the tone or pitch.
The intensity and confidence almost convince her, almost turn
her against
what she has known for years, what her experiences have taught her.

But words strain in her ear, take on the nature of a malevolent fable
told with a moral never to talk back. People sound troubled,
disappointed
when she tells them she doesn't believe, though they shift
into a softer

more intimate hawking, as if to say *yes, I understand, I too
didn't believe
at first, but that's why I'm calling, to save you pain*. Her life
is in the hands
of relayers from Marathon who purport to eyewitness status,
who say

they alone, not Pheidippides, watched the battle, and in their stories
the Persians triumphantly marched into Athens, and telling
you this
for your own good. Be careful, all stories are full of lies.

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Sitting in the Drake

I have no new myths for fat, yellow columns
and a discarded Baedeker at the Drake.
The stories I fall upon are old and distant,
not mine nor my family's nor my culture's.

A wolf went out swimming far from shore
and had to be rescued by men in a canoe.
They carried him back to their village
where he stayed and hunted with them.

I stole that memory from totem poles
and house posts of southwestern Alaska.
Tomorrow, I'll steal laments from Tu Fu.
In the overstuffed armchair opposite,

a young woman; bare throat, blouse
thrown on, bony face; reads a best-seller
probably purchased at the newspaper stand.
In it an older man befriends children

in rest stops, outside police stations,
and invites them out for fatherly advice.
He ran the child against the window
and, tired, after exerting all his strength,

stepped over the windowsill through
the splintered wood and glass.
I remembered that sentence because
it said something I didn't want to hear,

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and said it well. That's the odd thing
about stories, without someone to hear,
without a place that needs their naming,
one's left alone in an overstuffed chair

with a silent page and a whisper
while what most horrifies reaches up
from the book, and no one knows
what has been recognized, and no rescue.

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Brooks Haxton

An Interval of Five Tones Being the Dominant

Five is the sum of this world figured by the senses,
and the tally of the planets to the naked eye,
four directions with one person wandering at the pivot.
Five is the head and hands and feet, the five wounds,
and the five loaves for the hunger of five thousand.

Torah has five books with twice five laws
inside an ark of shittimwood, the twice five curtains
of the tent, the scarlet, blue, and purple linen, stitched
with cherubim, the wooden pillars overlaid with gold
with hooks of gold and sockets made of brass.

After Empedocles, four elements made up the world,
tinged, Aristotle thought, with aether, called
in alchemy quintessence, which is five. The Five Wits,
once upon a time, were common sense (or mother wit),
imagination, fancy, estimation, and remembrance.

In the House of Number, one is union. Two division.
Three joins one more to the halves of being.
Four, two twos, divides division; four seeks judgment.
Five holds two and three in consort. In the pentad
mystery trembles under the star of calculation.

Five enumerates the hand. The fist unclinches and flames
wobble from the upheld palm which is the sign of peace.
Five times a day, Muhammad cries out from his balconies.
Farewell and peace. Beside the corn, the passion flower
climbs the fence and wavers over a green bay full of starfish.

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Gregg Hodges

Desert Love, or Echo's Revenge

Narcissus was finally released, though sentenced
by demonic pardon to wander the ends of earth
searching for her. In southern Arizona, he heard
she'd settled nearby, rooted in alkaline soil.
He had a hunch she'd go where beauty was dry.
Ranch owner, local eccentric, she spent
too much time alone by local standards.
She'd turned to art, sculpture, the most
substantial art, taking as her inspiration
the Grand Canyon, not its weathered stone
escarpments, but the space they bring forth.
She made gargoyles from brass, copper, tin—
always in pairs. Their eyes first opened
in a crucible and they hold that heat in
blood pools, each floating an iris, yellow,
surrounding the pupils' uniform black.
Those metal twins perched on the gateposts
turn back her many suitors at the gate.
She granted Narcissus some license to follow
that dry throat of road. He was even beckoned
by a *saguaro*, arms creaking in air so thin
and clear the day moon's scrap of light
threatened to slip through. It sliced to get
at him, needled him, pricking at his clothes
until to move at all, he took them off.
He came to her, naked, coppered by the sun.
There was a pool of water, seasonal at best,
ringed by a scale of salt. Even rattle-tongued
geckos wouldn't drink. He found her there,
holding a brass woman—holding herself—veined
with darkness, informed by fire, scooped

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from the deep earth. Metal and flesh fused.
Metal the medium between Echo and Narcissus.
She showed him her *agave*, a lead and silver
century plant. Its mechanical blossoms still
fat buds enfolded. "These are solid," she said,
"and last. One day their watch-works will bloom
hot steel, sulfur, and form filament seeds
that spring out, extend my wild regions."

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Mark Irwin

Robert Mapplethorpe's Photograph of Apollo (1988)

What's missing is the body, its nakedness wrapped
in marble. What's missing is the hair, the floating hair
that falls in chalky tendrils. Only the face, huge
and larval-white, peers into the darkness.
Still, this is perfect youthful manhood, iridescent
against chaos. The eyes, wild and vacant, look
but see nothing. What slaking difference?—
They have known ecstasy, that patina
marble carries everywhere. A suddenness
unwarranted, beautiful. The lips, moistened, part
more to breathe than speak. Such desire,
a poetry. The silk of the moment before him,
the rest becomes salt, memory, history.
There is order here, but passion is its spectacular
disarray. The music turning toward light
shadows. O god of the healing art
where is the beautiful lyre of the body?

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Pimone Triplett

Persephone and Hades

I

It's slippery, the little by little you're left with,
thread of a peacock in profile
glimpsed on a chimney,
the field, all violet, where he found me,
unravelling
to that grainy black and white,
that theft

sleight of hand

of him interrupting what I was, alone,
wading in the count of
fuchsia, pepper, and oak trees

the echo

plum-orchid, azalea

of her unstrung nouns

I'd been at it, stitching the green
ongoing lines exactly, mapping the slackness
of stem and first fruit, holding
magnolia to form while I waited for
the voice of

small, alone,
picking the cream edges
as if she owned

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my image, myself, something

not to be repeated

russet wing in apricot, apple,
breeze emptying itself into current,
current starting to speak
spiral, then his whispering

get in

then the one dictum

be still

II

Having to own myself now and silence, air, the space
between fan spokes and keeping still

at the end of flesh

having to own the weather brushed with coal dust,
the monument of blackened soldiers
at the entrance, owning history,
our parenthesis, husband, our

your

thin hieroglyphs

here's the cold and hot
we speak in, receding,
here's the moment that never stops
making itself, passing into

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the frame of its absence

and me nothing less than the sharp edge
of what the story asked for,

needle of another baby, beetle, cornstalk

being thrown into the fire

to be born,
at which time I go down and always

please don't

open my mouth, my hands

interrupt me

to die into earth that's damned again

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Two Poems by David Schloss

Words Instead of a Thousand Pictures

The British Museum

One Centaur holds up the newly flayed
skin of a lion while trampling a man
whose whole face is sheared away
from the marble of the Parthenon:

"Even stone rots," stone seems to say,
with all the old meanings that men
still try to retrieve, to preserve
their flesh burned by light into air.

Classical remnants no longer serve
to keep the straitened earth we share,
yet, wrestling on the heads of pins,
trying to save just what they mean,

we carve our own grave accents on
their uncertainties, like everything
whose broken pieces of marbled skin
define our faces' fates, being human.

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Tourists Under Glass

Topkapi

They grin at solemn heads with laurel wreaths
calcified to mottled rock, lopsided, bent—
and wish to fold themselves like thin gold leaf
around each skull left pregnant with intent:

those underwater stares in sepulchres,
with veins of darkness cutting through the bones,
the brains; those perfect teeth in gaping jaws,
adrift in aisles of semiprecious stones.

They see the hand of John the Baptist, kept,
a bit of sallow skin and withered flesh,
encased in gold and jewels in Istanbul—

and come to know the ways that skeletons
articulate themselves in tombs, museums
grown up around them, glassed-in, beautiful.

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Bones

Marcia Guthridge

The bus seemed more crowded than it was, because half the passengers were smashed into the forward quarter. I stood with five other people on the steps by the front door; and whenever the bus swerved I held onto a metal post, the doors swung open, and my back hung out over the street. I could see from this recurrent vantage (my head stayed upright), between someone's bulging shopping bag and someone else's silver-studded beret, that four feet of standing room in the middle of the bus was empty. Someone I couldn't see had mutely rebelled in the aisle, refusing to move to the back of the bus, and no one seemed inclined to mention it. I wondered at the messiness of my vision. Skulls and limbs seemed tumbled together from where I watched: a hat on the same level as a shopping bag, worn? carried?—and also that beckoning, tantalizing empty space in the aisle.

The bus driver had taped a blue-crayoned heart to the windshield, and at every corner he screamed something about love and announced the time, as if screaming were what we all needed, or love, or wristwatches. The few people whose faces I could see—the ones jammed against me on the doorsteps,

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whose breath I breathed—smiled beatifically when the bus driver screamed. Maybe screaming was what they needed. I needed a place to stand. So, without checking to see whether I was close to home, I waited for the doors to malfunction again on a slow curve, allowed myself to fall backward out of the bus and sat down on the curb. I had never gotten close enough to the coin box to pay my fare.

It is clear now that things were not quite normal with me. I was vulnerable to an epiphany. I needed a place to stand. The street where I had landed was unfamiliar, though I must have passed it a thousand times before on the bus. This was my regular route. The houses behind me and across the street were two-story frame cottages, all painted gingerbready—yellow with blue trim, brown with green—and the lawns were small and velvety with no dandelions. Near the street in front of each house was an old-fashioned loaf-shaped mailbox on a post. Some of them were painted to match their houses; stuck on others were colorful decals of small animals holding banners with names printed on them; little red flags poked up from some to indicate to the mail carrier that outgoing mail waited in the box. Everything was clean. I saw no chipping paint around the windows of the houses. I looked hard for a withering shrub in the shade of an eave somewhere, but the vegetation was pruned and eerily healthy, the grass and leaves an unearthly uniform deep and shadowless green. The only sign of disorder was the sidewalk, which was here and there buckled and crumbling. Next to where I sat on my curb a huge tree root had broken ground. I couldn't even see a tree on the block, which seemed big enough to match such a root. Though it only disturbed the grass a little, like the spine of a sea monster barely cresting a tiny wave, where it tunneled under the sidewalk it surfaced boldly, as if it hungered for concrete, gnarled and knotty, and made a hill. Smaller root fingers reached up through a network of sidewalk cracks. I lay on my back in my business suit and thought about what was burrowing beneath me. This was not like me. This street was not like mine.

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I live in an apartment house on a wide city boulevard with trash in the gutters and signs on the lampposts forbidding the parking of bicycles. The sidewalks are in fairly good shape. There are no trees to ruck them up—only now and then ragged saplings planted by the city, none of which ever manages to grow bigger than a large twig, I guess because of gasoline fumes. They die, and the bare sticks stand for two or three years, and then a city landscaping truck comes around and pulls up the dead baby tree and plants another doomed one. I've always wondered why bicycles aren't allowed on my street. My wife says it's because they look messy, but I don't understand anyone who would worry about messy bicycles on a street with trash in the gutters, dead twigs sprouting, throngs of teenagers with hostile hairdos slouching between the Wendy's and the record store across the street and at least one wino asleep on every corner. Now, the street where I sat down after dropping off the bus that day was neat, except maybe for the hillocky sidewalk. Bicycles chained to the trees might make a difference. On this street, there weren't even any people to look messy. The only person I saw was, from the back, someone sitting on a bench at the bus stop a block and a half away. I couldn't tell if it was a man or a woman, but it must have been a cripple, because I could see a pair of crutches propped against the bench and also a small dog on a leash.

My wife is a phony. That's why she understands about the bicycles. That's also why I had to get off the bus. I couldn't stand that bus driver yelling about love. On that day, I was completely fed up with phonies. My wife rides her bike to her health club, which happens to be on the same street we live on, ten blocks down; she pays a dollar to park her bike in an underground parking lot, with all the cars, because of the signs that say you can't chain a bike on the boulevard. Then she goes high upstairs where the view is airy, and she sits on machines that move her muscles. She's afraid of the truth. She wears antiperspirant all the time, and she returns from the health club smelling bitterly of lavender. She doesn't like to shower there because she would have to take too much

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stuff with her on the bike, so she comes home in her sweat clothes, her sweat glands choked with perfume. Her body looks the way she wants it to—small and hard.

She seems to have an appetite for me; she likes to bite my shoulders. She is compelled by flesh—my flesh, her flesh, everyone's flesh, for all I know—the illusion of flesh. I do know she works out on the Nautilus machines instead of the Universals, because at her health club they have the Nautilus ranged around the outside of the weight room facing the mirrored walls. She says her trainer says the Nautilus is safer, but I know she likes to watch her muscles blossom according to plan, and her pores pulse with stifled sweat.

She takes care to look away from my mouth when I eat. But when we make love she hunches her shoulders and looks down at our bodies slapping together, so if I happen to open my eyes I see always the hair arranged over her forehead and the tip of one trimmed eyebrow. Until a year ago, because of this, women's eyebrows were an erotic sight to me. Once I had a quite horrible nightmare about a seamstress whose eyebrows had been singed off at a bonfire.

Last week, just as I was getting out of the shower, my wife came into the bathroom, sat on the edge of the tub and gazed raptly at the middle of me as I dried myself. I became uncomfortable, wrapped the towel around my waist and turned still dripping to shave. She shuddered and breathed, "Excalibur. And you handle it so casually." I lathered my face and tried to ignore her, but she continued to sit, looking misty in the puffs of steam from the shower. I knew she wanted me to return a comment in kind, ecstatically physical. I caught her watery hopeful eyes in the mirror and slowly opened a black cavern in the soapsuds, my mouth.

"Your organs are fascinating too," I responded. What I continued thinking about after she left the bathroom, presumably satisfied, was how odd it sometimes seems to me that she has a wet sticky place on her like a sore. She wears a sanitary pad everyday, even when she doesn't have her period, like a Band-Aid stuck onto her underwear. And for all that, she

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only wants to watch my body because of how it might react to hers; hers she adores because she made it at the health club. She's a phony: it is not even the illusory flesh she exalts so much as her own sly triumph over it. Ha!

Though I felt oddly comfortable on the curb where the bus had dropped me, I couldn't have expected what happened next. It came along quite suddenly. While I was looking around, taking in the vivid houses and the cartoony mailboxes, the neatness and the bumpy sidewalk, the person who had been sitting on the bench down the street got up and walked toward me. By the time I noticed her, she was within a few feet of me, and her little dog had wound its leash around her several times. She was stumbling on crutches, with one leg in a cast which reached up past her knee and disappeared under her skirt. The dog had tangled the cast and one crutch together and now hung by its neck nipping at the woman's other leg. She swayed precariously at the cratered summit of one of the hills in the sidewalk. The left crutch, with no dog suspended from it, she had planted on a splintery root, and it was slipping out from under her.

I jumped to the rescue, smearing grass stains on my suit pants as I scooted to stand. I tried to grab the woman by both shoulders so she wouldn't fall, but the dog was writhing in the air in front of her and I couldn't get close enough to grip her. So I ran around behind and reached for her waist, but by this time she had started to sink, apparently on purpose. The leg with the cast on it slid away from her at a disturbingly widening angle and made a grating noise on the sidewalk. She didn't seem to want me to help, so I stood back with my hands on my hips and grimaced at how dead her white casted leg looked, flung away from her body like a piece of bleached driftwood. She was out of breath. When she hit the ground, the little dog jumped at her face and gnawed her ear. She turned her head to look up at me, and it never let go.

"He's not completely weaned yet," she said. "And thank you, but I had to sit down, or he would have hung there and choked himself. I had to get his feet on the ground. Don't worry. I'm rather limber."

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It took her a few minutes to heave herself back up. I held one crutch while she did; I also held the dog, whose stubby legs kept moving while I held it, as if it were chasing flying rabbits. It grabbed the end of its leash in its mouth, gagged, spit it out, yipped twice, continued running in the air. I almost dropped it. She said, "Put him down, why don't you?" I did, and its legs never slowed: it ran to the end of its leash, coughed and sat abruptly.

I walked her home, with the dog's leash wrapped twice around my wrist. The leather gouged my skin and turned it red, and still the strong stubborn little dog jerked me so that every four steps I lurched and tripped on tree roots in the sidewalk cracks. The woman and I weren't able to talk much. She was busy with her crutches, I with her dog. She was not skillful with the crutches; I thought her injury must be recent. At a mailbox covered with baby foxes she turned and invited me into her house. It looked similar to all the others, painted teal blue with the eaves and window trim bright yellow. "It looks like a fairy-tale house," I said because she had released me from the dog, and I had a moment to think of something to say. The dog ran free now, sniffing in the fenced front yard, and I dragged the limp leash to the front door.

"My children are in school," she said, I thought inconsequently. Maybe she was thinking of fairy tales. But even with the children gone, her house proved to be filled with creatures. There were lots more dogs about the size and shape of the one we'd left in the yard and something in a cage in a shadowy corner of the front room. Two of the dogs, once I looked hard, turned out to be cats, but had evidently forgotten how to behave like cats: they ran to the door with the dogs as it opened, wagging their tails, making noises and trying to knock the woman off her crutches. Some animal I couldn't see squealed from another room.

"Our dog had puppies," the woman explained. "I told the kids we could keep one or two of them, because I felt bad we've lost so many hamsters recently. They've all gone under the floorboards and into the walls. Sometimes I hear them running at night, but I can't get to them."

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"How do you know it's not just mice you're hearing?"

"Oh, I guess I don't know for sure. It sounds like hamsters to me though." She was a rather vague sort of person.

"How do you decide which dog to take for a walk, when you have so many?"

"It's just the mood I'm in."

"I've never seen this neighborhood before." I peered into the cage in the corner and made out a form that looked like a cowled monk. It leaned toward me and I backed away. There were grapes on the bottom of the cage.

"Well, I usually walk one of the pups we're going to keep, but it all depends, and of course I haven't really firmly decided which ones those will be. I've got to get them housebroken. But everything is hard now." She knocked with a fist on her cast, then tilted her head in a funny way, by which she probably meant "can't be helped" or the like. But she looked to me as if she were listening for an answer from inside.

"How did you break it?" I wanted to know.

"I fell at a PTA meeting. I just stepped wrong. It doesn't make sense but it happened, fell to my knees I guess because the shoes I had on were high-heeled and teetery. The person behind me was not paying attention, talking to someone while he was walking down the hallway, and he tripped on me and he sat down hard right smack on my calf bone. It's shattered. He is a very big man—fat really. He's all right except his back didn't feel good for a few days. And I'm much better than I was. It doesn't hurt any more, but it's quite a complicated break. I'll be in this"—she knocked again—"for quite a few more weeks, maybe months, and I may come out deformed." She smiled brightly.

"You seem awfully chipper about it. It sounds terrible to me."

"Oh, I try to take the bad with the good."

"What's the good in this?" I asked.

She shrugged and batted away two dogs which had begun to gnaw the toes protruding from the cast. The toenails were messily painted a deep maroon—almost purple.

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"I will admit it's been hard raising a litter of puppies like this." She knocked. "My dog, my main dog, Myrtle—" She looked around the room for Myrtle and evidently couldn't find her. "—she's had a lot of pups, four litters already, and she's only not yet five years old. She was pretty bored with this bunch. In fact bored isn't the word, really. She tried to eat them at first, so I've had to do just about everything, feeding them with an eyedropper when they were tiny and all. I should have had her spayed, I guess, but I was afraid it would ruin her personality. But the trouble is neither of us has any time for personality like this. The puppies always come out looking just like her, no matter who the sire is. She must have strong genes."

"So why don't you get her spayed now?"

"I think it's too late. I don't mean she's pregnant again. At least I hope not. I don't remember why, but I think someone told me it gets to be too late after a certain point."

"Probably it does," I said portentously. I felt as if I were facing up to something important.

Suddenly all the dogs were barking, most of them crouching on their forelegs, facing every which way, their back ends quivering in the air. One or two of them ran crazily around the room, yipping, hopping on and off furniture as if it were nothing more than irregularities in the floor. I looked around for what had set them off. The thing in the other room began keening.

"Just a shadow, probably," the woman told me, raising her voice over the din. She shrugged. I noted that this was another characteristic gesture, akin to that knocking on the cast. She shrugged with only one side, coyly, dipping an ear toward the shoulder she raised. She looked a little like a puppy when she did this. Maybe she learned it from them. Sometime I found out her name was Eileen.

"What is that in the other room?" I asked her.

She came and sat close to me so I could hear her and answered: "A guinea pig. Don't be alarmed."

"Guinea pigs don't alarm me," I said and flinched as a dog

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hit my lap, then my shoulder, and sprang off over the back of the couch. I grabbed one pup and tried to hold it, thinking if I shut one of them up the others might calm down. But it wriggled, tried to bite my hand, bit its own paw, growled and kept wriggling so hard I thought it might break its back; so I let it go. It ran in circles yipping at my feet.

"May I ask you a question?" Eileen said. I nodded.

"Could we sleep together, do you think?"

I did not look at the cast on her leg, and I did not answer out loud because I wasn't sure I could answer out loud enough. The barking continued. I nodded again. I didn't think she saw me, so I kept nodding until my head felt disconnected, filled with nothing but noise. She was looking down at her cast. One way or another, though, she must have seen me nodding, because we went right upstairs and closed the bedroom door on the dogs.

It lasted about three minutes. I was frantic. There was something about the lopsided response of her body, one flat stiff leg lying beside mine while the other one twined convulsively around me, the immovable hardness I brushed when I moved, that excited me and made me rush.

Afterwards, I sat up. She was flushed and foggy with sweat. Her good leg, bent at the knee, swung from side to side rhythmically, and she held my hand. The other leg lay splayed to the side at its improbable angle, forced grotesquely akimbo by the bend in the cast. It was as it had been: intractable, stationary.

I smiled, took my hand from hers and touched her cast. It was bumpy. I looked closely and saw that it was made of something like cement netting, very faintly green, not white after all. "Isn't this an uncomfortable position to lie in?"

"Oh no. This thing is so heavy, it just falls where it falls."

"You must be limber."

"Didn't I tell you that about me?"

"Yes. I think so. You look wonderful."

"I feel like I'm half melted. It's warm. I feel like someone else. I've almost never cheated on my husband before."

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"Almost?" I laughed and touched the skin at the top of her thigh, where the cast stopped and its edge had rubbed a pink rash in the shape of Louisiana. She jumped at the touch.

"It's sore and itchy there," she complained, and squirmed. I checked the other end of the cast. Her toes weren't rashy, but they were yellow and dirty looking.

"I guess you can't wash those toes," I said.

"Not very well. It was silly to paint the nails, wasn't it?"

"Yes. It won't stop your leg being broken."

"This thing doesn't turn you off?" She knocked again. I began to imagine what might be inside: primitive animals, insects, a dark mangled limb, scurrying cells of calcium gathering will to vault the chasm between the shards of bone, leaping into the void, wanting to make tissue, barking softly when we knocked.

"On the contrary," I answered.

"It does my husband, I think. He tries to ignore it, but it gets in the way. That's probably why I'm here now, feeling like someone else. Do you mind that?"

"I don't mind anything about you. Or rather, I mind everything. I accept everything. Your forehead, and your hands are wonderful, your stomach. I love the rash on your thigh. I love your cast."

She was pleased. "You're a realist. You don't like painted toenails. Am I right?"

"You're right."

"Well, I'll get some polish remover and take it off." It was the smallest of promises.

But she forgot, and over the next few weeks the paint chipped off her toes little by little. They weathered slowly, like an old house in a humid climate. Once I found a tiny speck of vermilion stuck to my cheek when I got home and glanced into the bathroom mirror while I was washing my hands.

We walked the dogs in the afternoons. Usually I hopped off the bus before it stopped completely, in my eagerness, and tripped on a root in the sidewalk as I tried to slow down

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after jumping. I had been in the habit of taking long lunches to do errands or run, and then working late evenings; so no one at work noticed anything. I would take the dog leash, out of gallantry, and Eileen swung along on her crutches. Her cast, with age, became discolored and scuffed as her toenails peeled, and the rash on her thigh got redder. It almost bled. The dog—whichever one we took with us—never crapped or peed while we walked. There was a place on the carpet near the front door where they liked to excrete while Eileen and I made love.

Often we talked of mortality, which made me horny. She said she thought of herself as a person who lived close to death.

"You don't do dangerous things, do you?" I asked.

"Never. But I'm always having to think about death."

"Why?"

"I don't know, different reasons. More lately. I've been thinking about how, when I'm with you, I feel like a different person, like the person I was has died, and I'm having an afterlife. I never dared to hope for an afterlife before. It seemed like a silly thing to hope for, so immature, like a little girl wishing on the first star to become a princess. And you know that last fish in the aquarium?"

"What fish?"

"In the aquarium, in the kids' room."

"I haven't been in the kids' room. Why would I go in the kids' room?" But I had seen the aquarium. It hummed, and I had looked once through a bedroom doorway to see where the noise was coming from. The glass walls of the aquarium were so thick with green moss I couldn't see anything through it. The fluorescent light bloomed sickly inside, and I sensed bubbles spitting from the droning filter; but I had thought the tank was surely fishless and forgotten.

"Well, there's one angelfish in there, and I'm waiting for him to die so I can empty the tank and really scrub it. Tropical fish don't usually live very long, but that angelfish has been in there so long I've lost track of how old he is. He must be old. I feel so bad waiting for him to die. I can barely see him anymore."

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"Does he give you pleasure?" I was beginning to know her a little bit, but I still asked a lot of questions. In fact, her inclination to fill her painted house, on its tidy street, with teeming, messy wildlife, was strange and fascinating to me. I have always assumed that no one could explain the attraction some people feel toward hairy quadrupeds, but I thought maybe this fish was simpler—more under control, in its slimy tank.

She considered my question for quite a while before not answering it. Then she looked hard at me, or through me, somewhere, and said slowly: "I guess I could quit feeding him, so I wouldn't have to wait so long." She shrugged. "I guess I do have too many dogs. I can't help it." She might have been talking about a dust storm on a pioneer prairie or rampant weeds in her garden—some power she couldn't elude or fight. But there were no weeds in her garden. There were no flowers either (the dogs ate them); but she, or someone, kept the weeds as well as the grass pared back so that the yard was not conspicuous among its perfect neighbors.

"It's interesting to think about the things you can and cannot help," I agreed. "You can't help waiting for the fish to die. I guess that means I can't either." I leaned to inspect a smudge on the knee of her cast. The pale wintergreen color of it had deepened with lasting. From close up the little squares of fiberglass netting stood in high relief, seeming to rise toward my eye. I thought of a chicken-wire cage encircling my head. I kissed the brown smudge. "Your cast is getting old and worn," I sighed.

"So are we," she giggled. That made me horny.

I didn't like to talk to her about how excited I was by her broken bone. The contortions it wrenched us into during love were delicious. I even, ashamed, liked to imagine what it was like when she broke it first: the amusement on some faces at the slapstick fall, the useless solicitude on others, the shock and strain on her own, which, as I lay at night floating toward sleep and setting the scene, I matched with the look her face had in the moment before orgasm. It was peculiar to think

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of a woman like her tripping over her own feet at a PTA meeting—a woman so limber, a woman who, making soup in her kitchen, had to hop over dogs like an Olympic hurdler. Then again, she was at times adorably clumsy.

Her orthopedist told her after eight weeks that she would stay in the cast at least another month. The bone was refusing to knit. I saw her that afternoon. She was terribly disappointed, having arrived at the clinic with an extra shoe in her purse, thinking she would come home uncased. Secretly, ashamed again, I rejoiced.

I didn't talk about these things, but she knew them anyway. I don't believe I'm a sadist. Yet there was something explicitly mutable about her flesh which stirred me. My life before her had been so different. The apartment my wife and I have is air-conditioned. The windows are always closed and the curtains drawn against the noisy street outside. I went into the street only to stand at the bus stop. My bus was a local and came frequently; I never waited long. We shopped at large suburban malls, to which we drove, fetching the car from the underground garage beneath our building, rolling up the glass all round and running the computerized climate control. My wife did ride her bike daily to the health club, of course, but she wore wraparound goggles and a helmet and pedaled fast for the aerobic exercise. She kept her eyes forward, watching the traffic. She was deathly afraid of animals. Her sleep was rippled by nightmares of the mere pigeons she could hear burbling faintly under the eaves when the thermostat cut off the air conditioner. She never went to the zoo and avoided the meat counter at the grocery store. My wife was a vegetarian. If I craved chicken, I bought it stealthily and cooked it alone while she was at the health club, hiding the bloody wrappers under the rest of the garbage in the pail. The sight of Eileen's puppies chewing frantically at their mother's dragging teats and the sound of the mother's scrabbling toenails as she staggered around trying to shake them off would have caused my wife to gag. Eileen's life reversed mine. Her hobbling gamely around her properly painted house among the crying caged

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things and the hopping and waddling little dogs had something of the freakish about it: dwarfed and maimed, they drew me.

The guinea pig I had heard keening in the kitchen that first day turned out to be psychologically deficient. It had been a pet in one of Eileen's children's classrooms. The school refused to keep it in the building during summer vacation, and to save it from the Anti-Cruelty Society, Eileen had brought it home. When fall had come, it had stayed. But it remembered how relentlessly it had been chased and pounced upon in kindergarten, and it could not help crying out, now randomly. It screeched. And it was that other animal, the one in the dim cage in the living room, which howled. This was a bird named Nomkey, with trailing tail feathers. It did most of its howling at night, Eileen told me; but I heard it many times in the afternoon. The guinea pig sounded more like a bird than the bird. It was all perplexing, and though I spent my nights at home in my own quiet bed, my dreams were filled with grotesque creatures: a screaming bus driver, a bird-monkey and long-tailed pigs, all making the wrong noises.

Eileen's next-door neighbor was busy painting rocks red, yellow and blue. She lined her flower beds with them, alternating colors. Eileen never made excuses to the neighbor for my near-daily visits, but she did borrow some of the red paint and let me decorate her cast.

"Make me a costume," she said. "Disguise me." So I came the next day with many-sized paint brushes I'd bought at the hobby shop in the mall, and my *S* encyclopedia, which I turned to *skeleton*, and painted carefully on the cast the powerful thighbone, the two exquisite bones of the calf, delicately curving, almost twining, and in the middle the gracefully suspended kneecap, smooth as an ocean stone floating. I was surprised to find I possessed a certain finesse with the brushes. My hand trembled at first, but when I held my breath my arm swooped surely and made the lines so true that when I finished the picture on the out-facing side, I painted the long bones again on the surface that faced Eileen's good leg, leav-

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ing, of course, the one round patella in the middle. "Like a crown," I said. "Or a beret," she countered, deflating me. I had become physically excited. Now she re-painted her toenails red, to match the bones.

One night, the howling in my dreams was so loud I awoke. The image of the bird Nomkey faded. There were no pigs of any kind in my bed. But the howling continued, beside my ear. I turned my head slowly and saw my wife's sweaty face making the noise. Her mouth was twisted. She had left off biting my shoulders of late and had done so quietly, without apparent suspicion. "Wake up," I shouted, and her eyes burst open. They were wet with tears. There was a damp place on my pillow where she had drooled. She told me she had dreamt of a red rock under which yellow worms curled, and it had frightened her. I sat up and asked, "How did you know about the red rocks?" But she had already fallen back asleep. Her fears were to the point, but always easily circumvented.

She had tapped into me somehow, in a way I would never have predicted. Or maybe I into her. My wife and I had been quite close at times, usually evenings. Recently, I had lolled afternoons in Eileen's bed, pulled off the bus at her curb by visions of her imperfections—her unpoetic doom, her rashy flesh, her recalcitrant bone (new cells balking at the leap over the splintered gap)—while my nighttime effluvia had mingled with my wife's. Our dreams had danced together over our bodies like sperms and eggs. So now I rubbed my wife's back while she slept. Though it was unmoled by the dermatologist, lacquery-smooth and fancifully muscled and her spittle on my pillow was clear and healthy, I knew she, and not Eileen, was my home. I had awakened. Nothing but a sound sleep keeps one decently unaware of pain and finitude. My knowledge came quickly. I had to give up Eileen; it was an illicit attraction.

But it took a while. I went to see her intending to explain everything, but I forgot how to explain soon after she put the kettle on for tea. She shrouded the shrieking guinea pig's cage with a dish towel to make it think it was sleeping or dead, then found a pencil in a drawer and poked it down the top

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of her cast to scratch an itch. I was immediately recaptured. I could not go home yet.

The next time I saw Eileen she was in the midst of drying her husband's bathrobe in the microwave oven. Such unsensible behavior was aphrodisiac to me. "I'm not myself," I gasped after I took her on the kitchen floor with the oven timer beeping and the computer light flashing END END END and the smell of scorched terrycloth drifting.

"So who are you?" she snickered.

"I'm a person who thinks he ought to be paying attention to what the microwave is saying. I never used to be such a person. Things outside myself never used to have meaning. How do you turn this thing off?" I knelt, reached up over the counter and banged at the microwave buttons. "I can take a hint."

She stood up, leaning on the counter with her weight on the one leg, and was working the hacked-off pant leg of her jeans over her cast. The denim edges were ruffled with uneven threads. "You mean this kind of hint: end, end, end?" This time her snicker was bawdy, as she wriggled her half-covered bottom in my face.

"I'm the kind of person who's dreaming in tandem with his wife." I closed my eyes on her sassy butt. "It's odd." We left it. I challenged the metaphysical microwave, refused to be bossed.

The day she got her cast off, we finally had the conversation I had been planning. She was melancholy. I watched her bathe. "I've been looking forward to this for months," she sighed. "I thought the day would never come." The perfumed oil she had put in her bathwater made the air feel sticky. When she propped the newly peeled leg on the edge of the tub, the atrophied calf muscle dangled like a hammock. She had no skin there—only scales which she scrubbed at with a Brillo pad, removing layers, uncovering more scales beneath. I wondered if there was really anything material at the core, anything that couldn't be scrubbed away.

"But now it's so horrible. It doesn't look like a leg, and it

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won't hold me up like the cast did." She began to cry. "And I feel bad that you dream with your wife. You know, I've been perfectly willing to cheat on my husband. I know what he deserves. But I don't know about her. Suddenly I feel bad. And I'm thinking about death. If I can get my cast off, when I thought the day would never come, then how about dying? That will come too."

I saw Eileen's logic. I always had. I kept trying to get home where things were right, where my cell was clean, and the days to come stretched sweet and vague, where my wife preened and (more or less) pined for me. But I could not quite pull free. As I tried to draw away, I pulled Eileen around with me. I slapped at the sticky spider threads that connected us, but couldn't disconnect. I had strolled blithely through the web, something had caught, and she trailed me now. She jerked at every step, now by my ear, now skidding at my feet. When I turned I saw her waving skinny brittle legs at me.

I concentrated on the corruption of flesh, because I knew that was what we had seen together. I suspected if I thought enough about it I would get tired. I thought about the mysteries of life and life ceasing. I thought of spiders, and how they dash along their threads and twirl and wrap caught bugs into mummies in an eyeblink.

On the bus I watched a sleeping fat man breathe. His body rose and fell, rose and fell. When his mid-parts rose his head fell back and hit the plastic seat, then everything contracted and began again. His shirt was open. His nipples might have been ON and OFF buttons. His skin was the color of winter asphalt. Inside were a pancreas and a liver, I was sure, and yards of tubing rising and falling. Beside him sat another man chanting a song, hostile and profane; and I thought if the chanting man were to punch the OFF button or to stick a pencil into the sleeping man's belly, how quickly it would stop pumping up and down. Then I was ashamed of such a thought; and then again, I said to myself, I had to think and think and think because I had to break the habit of Eileen.

I watched a television talk show with my wife. The four

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people on the panel wore shorts and tank tops. The moderator wore a suit and tie. The panel talked about losing weight and cried and hugged each other. My wife was moved and cried also. Then I went with her to the health club. I was trying to do things with her. While she went to the weight room, I decided I would swim. Instead I sat on the edge of the pool fiddling with my ear plugs, revolted by the swimmers. In their slick rubber caps and goggles, they looked like insects. They couldn't see one another. When they collided, they splashed momentarily upright, shook their heads and peered dimly about, then continued in their paths up and down the lanes. One old woman with a belly like a softening soccer ball did a breaststroke so dilute she seemed to paddle backwards whenever anyone passed her, left behind like a wasp in a whirlpool. Everyone in the health club—picking up barbells and putting them down, flexing, paddling, dashing up and down redundant tracks—looked to me to be fantastically, stupidly fighting the truth.

It happened that the thing to rid me of Eileen was her healing. She saw this and once, as we gradually parted, said: "It was piquant, wasn't it?" She gave up her crutches, and for a while she stumbled often. She had forgotten how to bend her leg at the knee and roll through the foot to walk, and this made her ungainly and sweet. But the limp faded and before long she only tripped on her dogs, as anyone would. She painted her toenails a muddy maroon, but I didn't care much. My interest was temporarily revived when I went one day with her to her physical therapy appointment at the hospital. The basement room was full of ruddy bodies rising from foamy whirlpool baths, and others twitching prone on gurneys with electrodes strapped to their shoulders and thighs. I escorted Eileen home with a bundle of ice strapped to her leg like a carbuncle. This was arousing, but transitory. The ice melted, and I went home. Instead of good-bye, she said to me, "Ashes to ashes," and I wondered if she too—if both the women in my life—were privy to my silent thoughts.

I stopped taking the bus, bought a bicycle and rode it to

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work to thwart temptation. Eileen's house began to seem like a fantastic place, a place I had been blown to by a tornado. I try not to think of Eileen's dogs, her bird-or-monkey crying in its cage or the hamster herds running behind the walls and under the floors. There is too much life there, which brings to mind small squeaking creatures, deformity and death. Eileen did not bother to try to hold me. She had been depressed in the last weeks we were together, thinking always that because her term in the cast had ended, she would soon die.

My wife's lust for me returned recently. She continues valiantly to fight the truth. She claims sex, like exercise, is life-affirming and good for the skin. She has made an appointment with a plastic surgeon to have her middle shaved down and sculpted and her breasts hoisted. I blanch to think how that may incite her hunger. My right shoulder is gnawn quite raw as it is. She will not allow the weight of years to quiet her.

I can feel growing in me an urge to bite her in return, to mortify her flesh—and she could hardly object. But for now, self-mutilation is the direction I'm taking. I have already begun drawing pictures on my leg with a very sharp lead pencil. I bear down hard, and the flesh of my thigh bubbles up and reddens around the dark lines. I've finished drawing my femur, and am working on preliminary sketches on paper of a small dog chewing it, near the knee.

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Charles Scribner III



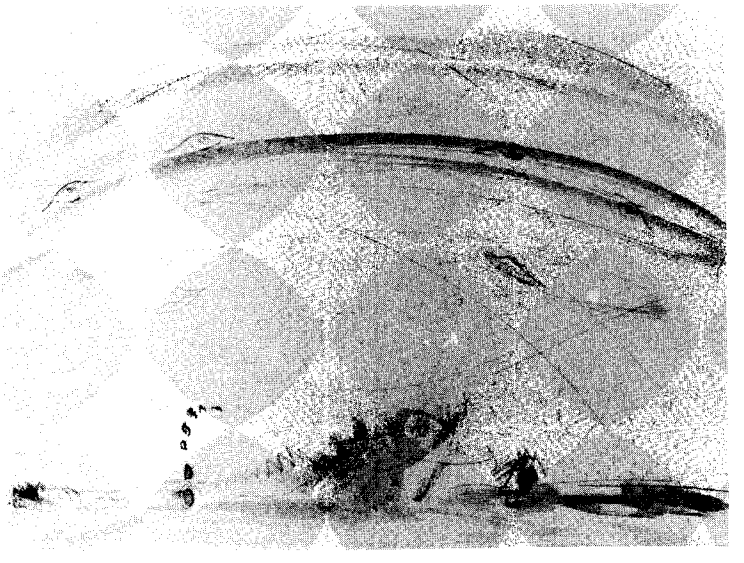
Gatsby Illuminated

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The following two sketches led up to Francis Cugat's painting for F. Scott Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby, *one of the most celebrated and widely disseminated book jackets in twentieth-century American literature. It represents a most unusual form of "collaboration" between author and jacket artist. Under normal circumstances, the artist illustrates a scene or motif conceived by the author; he lifts his image from a page of the book. In this instance, however, the artist's image* preceded *the finished manuscript.*

Francis Cugat, Spanish born brother of Xavier Cugat, the orchestra leader, had designed posters and movie sets in New York before he became an art designer in Hollywood for Douglas Fairbanks Sr. He was commissioned by Scribner's to provide a full-color illuminated dust jacket to be held in readiness for Fitzgerald's new book. It arrived seven months in advance of the delivery of the manuscript.

It is almost certain that Fitzgerald saw the jacket while still at work. Indeed, in a letter to Maxwell Perkins, his editor at



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Scribners, he writes, "For Christ's sake don't give anyone that jacket you're saving for me. I've written it into the book." The dust jacket seems to have influenced two passages. The first is the scene in the second chapter which describes the "valley of ashes" overlooked by a huge optician's billboard. "But above the grey land and the spasms of bleak dust which drift endlessly



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over it, you perceive, after a moment, the eyes of Doctor T.J. Eckleburg. The eyes of Doctor T.J. Eckleburg are blue and gigantic—their retinas are one yard high. They look out of no face, but, instead, from a pair of enormous yellow spectacles which pass over a non-existent nose. . . . his eyes, dimmed a little by many paintless days under sun and rain, brood on over the solemn dumping ground."

The alternative textual reference is Nick Carraway's image of Daisy as the "the girl whose disembodied face floated along the dark cornices and blinding signs" of nighttime New York at the close of chapter four.

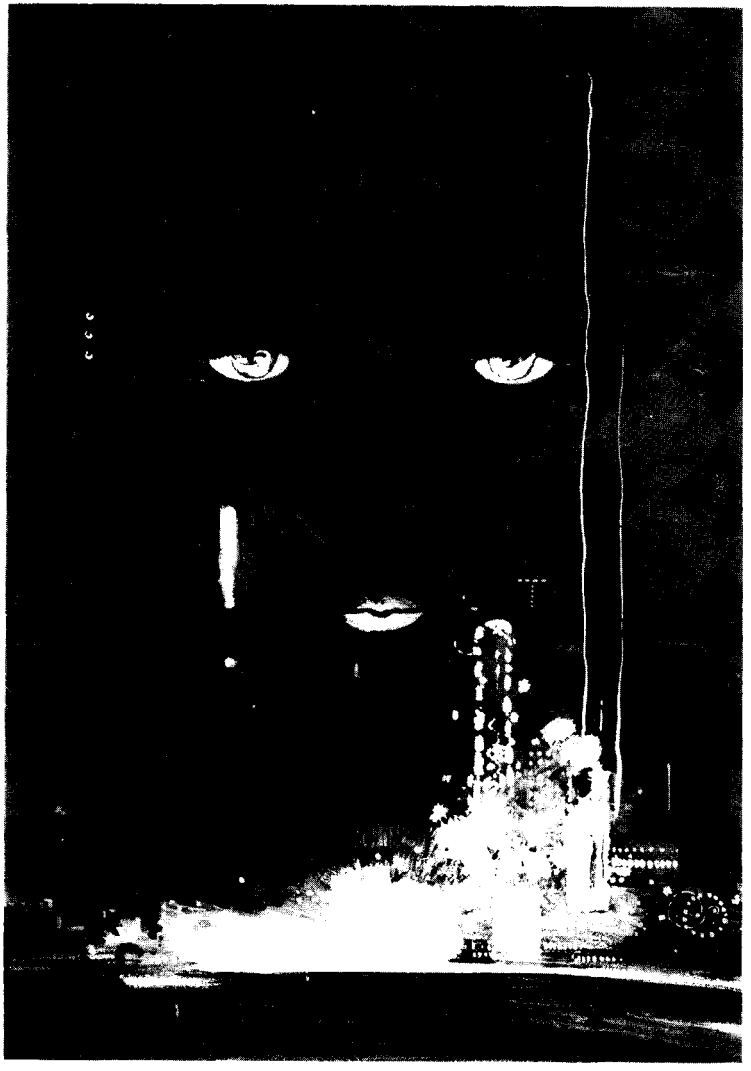
Still more possibilities are suggested by the preparatory studies and sketches. One shows the "valley of ashes" over which hover ghostly apparitions of sorrowful female faces—a series of sad, celestial eyes that the artist was to transform and clarify through subsequent sketches. The locales shifted from Long Island countryside to the Manhattan skyline, in turn relegated to a backdrop of the pyrotechnical lights of Coney Island. Cugat's carnival imagery is especially intriguing in view of Fitzgerald's pervasive use of light motifs throughout his novel—Gatsby's parties illuminated by "enough colored lights to make a Christmas tree of Gatsby's enormous garden." Nick sees "the whole corner of the peninsula . . . blazing with light" from Gatsby's house "lit from tower to cellar." When he tells Gatsby that his place "looks like the world's fair," Gatsby proposes that they "go to Coney Island."

Daisy's face, says Nick, was "sad and lovely with bright things in it, bright eyes and a bright passionate mouth." In Cugat's final painting, her celestial eyes enclose reclining nudes and her streaming tear is green—like the light "that burns all night" at the end of her dock, reflected in the water of the Sound that separates her from Gatsby. What Fitzgerald in fact extracted from Cugat's art and "wrote into" the novel must, of course, remain an open question. What is beyond doubt is that Perkins hit the mark when, having finally read the completed typescript, he declared the jacket "a masterpiece."

The sketches were discovered three years ago by Professor Matthew J. Bruccoli, the Fitzgerald scholar and biographer.

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He, with a student in his seminar at the University of South Carolina, Martha Alston, traced a collection of Cugat's work to an artist and restorer, Roy Blankenship, who had acquired them from a Connecticut gallery. The final version appears below. No other Cugat book jackets have ever been identified.



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Two Poems by Marilyn Hacker

For a Fiftieth Anniversary

The King of Denmark wore a yellow star.
French Jews paid for their own with one textile
ration-point: not what Pétainists wore
—and the jew squats on the window sill . . .

One thought it blasphemy his girls learn Torah.
One was the great-uncle of Simone Weil.
One was deported and so was the other
—and the jew squats on the window sill . . .

Habit and ideology illumine
banal perceptions of the human world.
The next-door neighbor's something less than human
—and the jew squats on the window sill . . .

The Eastern intellectual elite,
the ACLU-carded liberal,
the ecologists and the effete
and the jew squats on the window sill . . .

—or Palestinian, Croat or Greek:
invest with otherness, isolate, kill
the Paki or the nigger or the spic
—and the jew squats on the window sill . . .

Seventeen then, she's sixty-six, alive
this year to give her testimonial:
"Two days after the Fête de la Bastille,
I mean, two days from when it would have been,
another year, before the occupation,
I watched my mother and my brother leave

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—the orders said 'all children under sixteen'
and 'no unnecessary conversation'—
on what had been a city bus until
they gave it a new route, to the Vel d'Hiv.
I didn't see either one of them again."
—and the jew squats on the window sill . . .

Year's End

I.M. Audre Lorde and Sonny Wainwright

Twice in my quickly disappearing forties
someone called while someone I loved and I were
making love to tell me another woman
had died of cancer.

Seven years apart, and two different lovers:
underneath the numbers, how lives are braided,
how those women's deaths and lives, lived and died, were
interleaved also.

Does lip touch on lip a memento mori?
Does the blood-thrust nipple against its eager
mate recall, through lust, a breast's transformations
sometimes are lethal?

Now or later, what's the enormous difference?
If one day is good, is a day sufficient?
Is it fear of death with which I'm so eager
to live my life out

now and in its possible permutations
with the one I love? (Only four days later,
she was on a plane headed west across the
Atlantic, work-bound.)

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Men and women, mortally wounded where we
love and nourish, dying at thirty, forty,
fifty, not on barricades, but in beds of
unfulfilled promise:

tell me, senators, what you call abnormal?
Each day's obits read as if there's a war on.
Fifty-eight-year-old poet dead of cancer:
warrior woman

laid down with the other warrior women.
Both times when the telephone rang, I answered,
wanting not to, knowing I had to answer,
go from two bodies'

infinite approach to a crest of pleasure
through the disembodied voice from a distance
saying one loved body was clay, one wave of
mind burst and broken.

Each time we went back to each other's hands and
mouths as to a requiem where the chorus
sings death with irrelevant and amazing
bodily music.

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Two Poems by Carl Dennis

Integer

Shall I give up on salvation
And suppose the unit of life isn't the self,
As I always assumed, but the twenty houses
That comprise my block? Which house puts in the hours
Required each month by the block's one conscience
Won't be the issue then, as long as the slot gets filled.
A comfort then to wake before dawn
And glimpse through curtains the light
Already burning in my neighbor's study,
Proof that the block's quota of early writing
Is on its way to completion and I can sleep in
Or drive to the farmer's market for groceries
Since shopping too is a category of useful action
And spaces are still blank on the sign-up sheet.
How free I'll be, once I abandon the notion that my deeds
Should make me larger, that I'm kin to a tree
Concocting sun and rain into leaf and bole.
At last a life without emulation or envy.
At last the hope of a death that's calm
As I accept the end of my many projects
And my dream of heaven. The street
Will survive me. My dust will return to it,
And my soul too, though smaller than I imagined,
No bigger than a katydid in a bush by a gate
As it helps a yard meet its quota of squeaking.

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The Great Day

What if the great day never comes
And your life doesn't shine with vivid blossoms,
Just with the usual pale variety?
What if the best china never seems called for,
Those dishes reserved for the friends you love the most
On the day they return from their endless travels?
To use them now, for the only occasions available,
Would be to confuse the high realm with the low.
But not to use them, doesn't that seem wrong too,
To leave the best wine undrunk in the cellar
For the next owner of your house to open?
What then? Can you will yourself to see a common day
The way a saint might see it, as a gift from heaven,
Or the way it appears from the window of the hospital
On the first morning the patient feels strong enough
To edge across the room and look out?
There on the street, an angel policeman
Is directing the flashing mosaic of traffic.
Or can you see the day as the dead might see it,
Not the ones who'd rather rest but those delighted
To abandon the gardens of Hell, however fragrant,
For a chance at crossing the sea again in a storm.
The day their ship, long given up for lost,
Steams into the harbor, all flags flying,
Would be a day to be toasted with rose champagne
In heirloom glasses. Down the gangway they come,
A little thinner, a little unsteady,
Eyes wide in wonder at their rare good fortune.
Can you see what they see as they look around
Or feel what their friends waiting on the dock
Must feel as they run forward,
Suspending their formal speeches of welcome.
"Let me look at you. You look good.
You look wonderful."

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Three Poems by Scott Cairns

Inscription

After the plague had come and gone a second time,
after the panic, after the convulsive festival,
after the silence had set in a second time,
I was astonished to observe I was still standing.

And there were one or two others in my region
similarly astonished and similarly
alone, but we kept apart, preferred not to tempt
fate—as it were—preferred this monastic enterprise,

which we, I suppose, undertook in a mixture
of mute relief and nagging culpability.
Nor did I presume the serpentine contagion
had withdrawn completely. The last outbreak had lain

a great litter of corpses, some of which yet offered
trembling carrion to what few corruptible
beasts survived with strength enough to forage still.
Along every path, at the edge of every

stubble field, anonymous remains flourished,
tattered like springtime gardens after rain. And one
knew better than to enter any darkened dwelling,
aware of what surely lived there now. I drew my

shelter from the mud and stone far from any road,
any chance for intercourse, and lay me down within,
having resisted long enough only to scrape
my puzzlement, this witness, in a likely rock.

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And Also from the Son

qui ex Patre filioque

As you might expect, my momentary vision barely
qualifies: you know, sensation something like the merest
swoon, some uncertainty about why all of a sudden
the back garden, its bamboo and rose, the reaching pecans
(one's apparent field contracting to a field of vision)
took to trembling, as well as other accompanying
uncanniness. I mean, *was* the garden trembling or had
it suddenly, unnaturally stopped? Was the appalling
motion something I was seeing or something I was
seeing with? And why am I asking you?

Perhaps I'm not. Probably, the most I'm doing is one
kind of homage to a moment and a form, a rhetoric
disclaiming what the habitual senses can't make much of.
This is what I'd vouch for: I was at rest in a still,
restfull corner of our back garden. I had expected
even to doze, but instead found my attention fixing
all the more alertly on the narrow scene, and then I
wasn't seeing anything at all, which is why I'm less
than eager to call this business exactly a vision.
Does one ever *sink* into a vision?

Let's suppose one might. Once interred, what does one come
to find?
I found the semblance of a swoon, and began to suspect
ongoing trouble at the heart, a fullness in the throat,
an expanding, treble note whose voice was neither mine alone
nor completely separate. I know enough to know you
cannot believe this, not if I were carelessly intent
on saying it was so. It was a fiction which I chanced
upon as evening overtook our walled back garden—
whether by virtue of light's ebbing or the fortunate
influx of approaching shade, who would say?

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Mortuary Art

Even the ancient, open gate—whose hinges may
as well be stone, whose purpose has always been
purely ornamental—rests extravagantly
at its protected terminus: black *fleurs-de-lys*
topping a Byzantine blaze of black ironwork.

Once inside, the live-oak- and ash-dappled expanse
of gaudy statuary seems infinite, spreads
far as you can see and, presumably, farther:
a great many winged forms, more or less angelic,
some bearing human burdens, others extending

arms in an open embrace, but all with the same
expressionless faces of weary dockworkers.
Whichever narrow lane you choose, you find ahead
a multitude of crosses: Latin mostly, but
mingled with scores of Greek and Celtic, one or two

pattée, botonée, and down a lonely detour
the still, dire flames of one startling, spiny Maltese.
Pausing before any one of these explains
what time is for: lending weather its circumstance
for dissolving whatever it happens across.

All cemetery roads converge upon a center
where—dwarfed and nearly obscured by outsized,
marble masonry and a high ring of ancient
trees (so much like stone)—lies a brackish pool like tar.
Nothing lives in it: its waters compose a grim

accumulation of poisons laid out to keep
the foreground neat, deceptively green, natural.
Still, one is very likely to neglect the font
(so easy it's become to slight what isn't blemished),
and wander off, though the dust of the throat goes drier.

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From the shallows of that ruined pool, a copper tube
—flanged at the lip, and no thicker than your finger—
blossoms out beyond its stem into something
of a calyx, or white anemone, a wavering
rush of water so pure you'll want to drink of it.

One imagines we need not confuse the fountain
with its pool any more than we need pretend
the gate, the angels, the scores of crosses partake
in our little stroll among the dead, or suffer
interest in our being here among them.

In that cove, water from the font leaps up, its foam
drawing light from some obscurity beyond the trees,
inviting all who have come this far to proceed
a little farther, to press their lips against
the rising pulse where all may drink or may withdraw.

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Three Poems by Edwin Gallaher

Jocasta

Loving that man was a way of hating God:
useless, and no sense of privacy.
The fates fell, like cats tumbling
down the palace stairs, and soon I fell—
we all fell—so many dry men in Thebes.
Piece by piece was miscast, dissembled:
the crossroads at midnight, men's bones
shattered against fire-creased iron.
Crowned triumphant, he solved riddles,
told lies, made much of love and daughters.
He of course will spare them the knife.
Yet he never told me how the history
of man and woman was a kind of amnesia,
a handsome riddle unanswered and unasked.
Imagine the fury and fireworks of stories
told by men who can't see. Imagine
an army and war. Imagine two lovers
who make both bed and grave together.
I am alone, and these bright threads
tangle in their deadliness. Hanging
from the beam, I wish the stars were blind.

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Postcard to Cynthia Macdonald in Italy

Finally in a land more extravagant than you, dear,
more extravagant, yes—but pointedly less distinctive.
I envision you needled by shadows from statues
our culture cares to imagine no longer. *A camera flash*,
and everything blurs to blindness. *A camera flash*;
Venus loses an eye, an arm. The Mediterranean blue
passes ships into history, menopause, psychoanalysis,
into the abrupt brutality of the baroque imagination,
and I wonder if you loiter there—within camera range—
like junkies beneath the vaults of the lionized coliseum.
Two clouds above the basilica tear apart like ancient pastries,
as cabs splash dark coronas on glistening cobble-walks.

Beware the local veal dish, dear—delicately
garnished, oiled, stripped from racks of bone.

Upstairs at the Copernican Revolution

people are laughing, people are throwing
their wine glasses against the sad fires
of the sky. The men in the trees
seem to suggest how things could be different,
as if tomorrow could be followed
by today, today. But there is a disgust
hidden narrowly in any science,
and downstairs in our sandbag kingdom
we all roll our Peter's pence and drained chalices
across the floor, sharpen our knives,
and learn—with tongues of ice and silver—
how the old sounds appointed for *tomorrow*,
today, *yes*, *no*, *good-bye*, *good-bye*, *good-bye*,
can be quashed by shining calipers.

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Two Poems by James Reiss

Dorland

You can't think of that pine tree by the window
without your mind skipping and scraping over rocks
away from it. Why does the whoosh
of wind in its limbs sound like a waterfall?

And why can't you hear the crazy yip-yap of coyotes
at sundown without thinking it must be a pack of boys
in the ravine pretending to be wolves? You might
as well be wearing earplugs or a blindfold

as dwelling on a mountainside with hawks
and ravens that squawk uniquely
while, outside your cabin in the darkness, stars
shine like nothing you have ever seen.

Like nothing you have ever heard,
the caterwauling of a mountain lion
keeps you awake the night after
your hike to the Far Spring,

where, under a full moon, you caught the glint
of water when a tawny flash in the brush
leaped on another tawny back
and brought it down without a sound.

The truth is, you lost your head
when you were a boy pretending to be
Shelley. He could not feel the wind
without thinking of freedom. He could not hear

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a bird without naming it "spirit." The truth is,
you lied like him so well you could no longer
distinguish the world from the word,
a bird on the wing from a feathery notion.

This morning the colony cat in the pine
is a vague gray ball. As she clambers
up the trunk, her claws sound like bare
facts sticking to the varnished truth.

When she settles into a crook in a limb
and swishes her tail, her ears lie flat
against the side of her head.
In broad sunlight she stares

you down, yellow eyes unblinking,
without a meow, her mouth curled
into what looks like a grin,
while she asks the riddle you can't answer.

Dark Conceit

In the Parable of Fire a driver who has been dozing
lowers his car window and pitches his cigarette
into a gulley at midnight. As the spark smolders
and glows under dry chaparral, the first level
of meaning may be glimpsed: literal, dim.

When a breeze fans the glimmer into a glaring
expanse, the smoke plume rises like an emblem
and sets down a bed of ash, new layers
of thought where locoweed and desert phlox
once covered the hill by the highway.

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The immigrant pickers asleep in tents near the ridge
think the smoke in their dreams comes from votive
candles back home. In a ritual they curl
more tightly into burlap bags and think
their wives lie beside them

while the flames advance higher, borne
by Santa Ana winds, as if by a will.
Yet the fire storm, with every intention
of blackening trees and singeing the moon,
maps out a myth whose meaning is written on water.

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Two Poems by Rachel Wetzsteon

Drinks in the Town Square

No sooner had they carried their martinis
over to the café's remotest table
and huddled close to praise the coming sunset,
red as a famous letter, than it happened:
empty when they had entered it, the square now
quivered with life. What she saw: burly spinsters,
big books in hand, refusing to be selfless,
women in white and, lurking in the shadows,
elegant lady spies. What he saw: strutting
romeos, hearts for rent, devoted scholars
for whom high windows could outshine rich widows,
cynics for whom all cities were the same.
They had come all this way, by plane, by marriage,
hoping to pit their love—with all its thriving,
colorful avenues, unending crops—to
everything else, but now the square was teeming
with all the faces they had left behind!
Visitors from their own obstructed futures
dazzled their eyes and scarred their hearts much more than
glamorous strangers they could never have,
and when the square began to reassemble
they butted heads and called each other darling,
as if to cover private crimes with public
blandishments. But there was no denying
that each grinning face was a murderer.
When all the ghosts got up and walked out, they were
left with a vivid sense of screen doors closing,
and when they staggered homeward, there were trembling
fists in their pockets, daggers in their eyes.

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Dissolving Views

High noon in the park, as the year begins its
onward march to truly infernal weather.
"Is it hot enough for you?" yell the normal,
but on the sidelines

all the lonely hopefuls whose blood is warmer
than their beds have gritted their teeth and gathered
in their finery for another round of
amateur sleuthing.

Wearing a big black hat, which she believes will
add to her mysteriousness, a woman
sizes up her prey, but he's far away; she
looks at him looking

at another, dimly exotic beauty
who—of all the maddening things—is stalking
a resplendent young man whose line of sight she
furtively follows,

hoping to attract his attention. But he
will not be distracted from his own goal and,
riveting his eyes, ogles up another—
wonder of wonders—

man! But still the travesty is not over:
he is looking longingly at the woman
in the hat, attempting to steer her heartache
in his direction,

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but in vain. She gives the whole chain a last look
and sits down, fatigued and disgusted, on a
nearby bench; this craven, pathetic horde of
frustrated lovers

is a shame, a waste! Only fools and martyrs
can endure unbearable oaths of silence
at the same time that they are seeing red and
screaming their hearts out.

Why not change her policy and *do* something?
Track her young man down and seduce him silly?
And then she reflects: it is not the way of
spies and romantics.

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Five Poems by Judita Vaičiūnaitė

Spring

Thawing weather,
  There's butchered meat on the bottom—
  and ice that's starting to melt through the shop window.
The morgue.
  The girl's dark hair—
  hoarfrosted, powerless, luxuriant.
Spring's bird-bodies quickly draw in,
  pick up grains on the wards' sills.
It's as if you hadn't been there at all.
  Sun. Silence.
  On the sidewalks—trash, turning black.

September Night

. . . And our number in the hotel—thirteen
  (yearning having been equally distributed).
Down comforter.
  In the drawer—a yellowing Bible. It's raining.
The clock in the hall's getting rained on.
  I wipe off the round mirror,
covered with a smoky, full moon.
  Filling with rain in the streets,
this September night's lifting me up
  in an old-time elevator.
Night's ending, time's tearing.
  And the cross streets fuse together in twisted images.
It's so sad, as if for Lapps.
  Their frozen stags start looking like stars.
(In the dream, my hands wreathe your neck,
  ever so slightly, gently.)

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Sleeplessness

Darkness washes over you . . .
Only the sofas are safe under the lamps' umbrellas . . .
I feel the earth so fully, beaten beneath the floor, the asphalt,
and the forgotten voices of the dead . . .
Balconies and squares are all grown green.
If I stretched my arms out quietly, I'd become a living cross.
But a cry cracks the street . . .
rips up my peace and quiet.
And the papers are full of huge lament
(can't, can't be repeated) . . .

•

Wires scream like that . . .
Statues, walls and stations rush by . . .
Empty trolleys swim past the cities,
washed down by dawn and fog . . .

Black Mirror

. . . Still sitting under that dress on the line,
in the attic, feeling the light
with my shoulders—
patterned, shadowy, from the cloth,
weightless, lightly swaying . . .
My body,
hot from thunder and lightning, cools down.
Weeding out solitude's rhythms:
I count the hours—empty, dusty
barrels
someone's rolling from the old cellar.

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I plunge into the night—sounds of wings, rustling,
and leaves, dripping into dust's shower.
And my black mirror, framed by the window,
cracking now from secret screams.

Vilnius. Archaeology

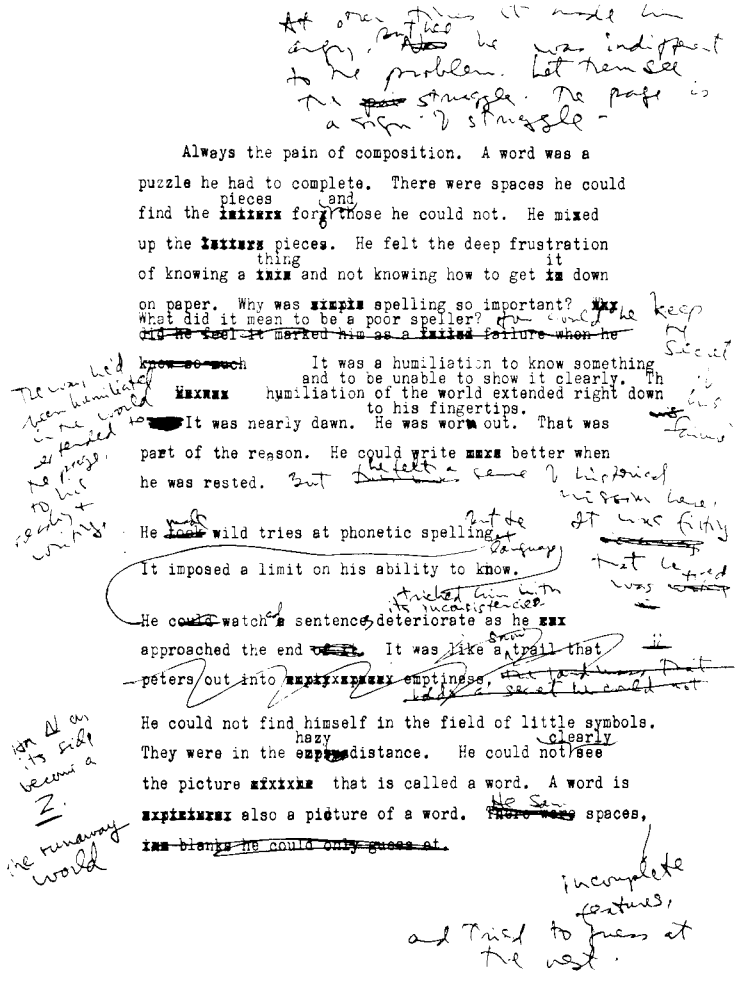
We unearthed the masonry walls,
doors and gates, burrow-like openings,
the cold stone steps,
the sky sinking in, deeper and deeper,
dug up the floor too, rumbling away—
exposing the centuries' composed layers.

We unearthed hard-up Troy,
poor little Pompei,
the sacred horizons of the subterranean city
—the chalk's ulcerated,
we freed our roots from the stone
—they're full of aching.

And once again we dug up the clear-edged
dream-, or ice-quarry,
the high crystal quarry—
its heart still beating to the left,
dug up the green of tile,
and the candle's flame, which we'll
protect from the wind with our palms.

—translated from the Lithuanian
by Viktoria Skrupskelis
and Stuart Friebert

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Always the pain of composition. A word was a puzzle he had to complete. There were spaces he could find the pieces and for those he could not. He mixed up the pieces. He felt the deep frustration of knowing a thing and not knowing how to get it down on paper. Why was spelling so important? What did it mean to be a poor speller? ~~did he feel it marked him as a failed failure when he~~ It was a humiliation to know something and to be unable to show it clearly. The humiliation of the world extended right down to his fingertips. It was nearly dawn. He was worn out. That was part of the reason. He could write better when he was rested. But

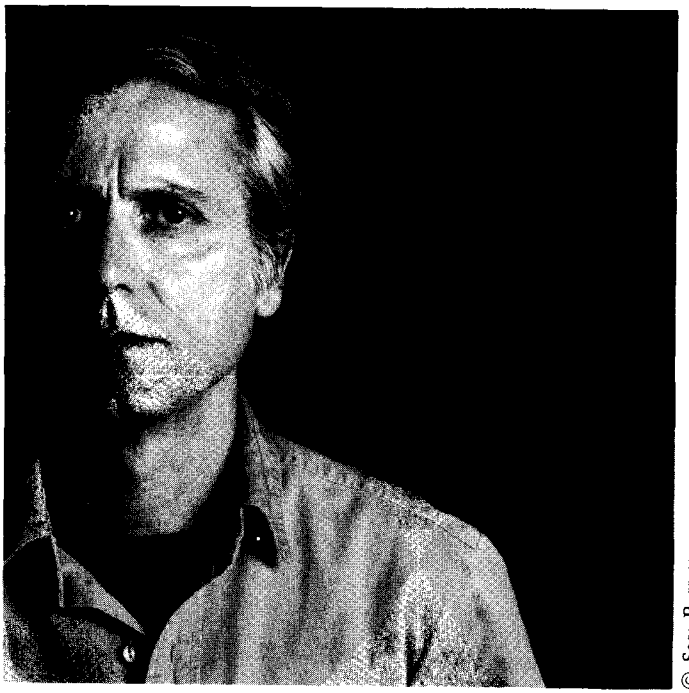
He wild tries at phonetic spelling. It imposed a limit on his ability to know.

He could watch a sentence deteriorate as he approached the end. It was like a trail that peters out into emptiness,

He could not find himself in the field of little symbols. They were in the hazy distance. He could not clearly see the picture that is called a word. A word is also a picture of a word. ~~There were~~ He saw spaces, ~~the blanks he could only guess at.~~ incomplete features, and tried to guess at the rest.

A manuscript page from the first draft of Don DeLillo's Libra.

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Don DeLillo

The Art of Fiction CXXXV

A man who's been called "the chief shaman of the paranoid school of American fiction" can be expected to act a little nervous.

I met Don DeLillo for the first time in an Irish restaurant in Manhattan, for a conversation he said would be "deeply preliminary." He is a slender man, gray haired, with boxy brown glasses. His eyes, magnified by thick lenses, are restless without being shifty. He looks to the right, to the left; he turns his head to see what's behind him.

But his edgy manner has nothing to do with anxiety. He's

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a disciplined observer searching for details. I also discovered after many hours of interviewing spread out over several days — a quick lunch, a visit some months later to a midtown gallery to see an Anselm Kiefer installation, followed by a drink at a comically posh bar — that DeLillo is a kind man, generous and thoughtful, qualities incompatible with the reflexive wariness of the paranoid. He is not scared; he is attentive. His smile is shy, his laugh sudden.

Don DeLillo's parents came to America from Italy. He was born in the Bronx in 1936 and grew up there, in an Italian-American neighborhood. He attended Cardinal Hayes High School and Fordham University, where he majored in "communication arts," and worked for a time as a copywriter at Ogilvy & Mather, an advertising agency. He now lives just outside New York City with his wife.

Americana, *his first novel, was published in 1971. It took him about four years to write. At the time he was living in a small studio apartment in Manhattan. After* Americana *the novels poured out in a rush: five more in the next seven years.* End Zone *(1972),* Great Jones Street *(1973),* Ratner's Star *(1976),* Players *(1977) and* Running Dog *(1978) all received enthusiastic reviews. They did not sell well. The books were known to a small but loyal following.*

Things changed in the eighties. The Names *(1982) was more prominently reviewed than any previous DeLillo novel.* White Noise *(1985) won the National Book Award.* Libra *(1988) was a bestseller.* Mao II, *his latest, won the 1992 PEN/Faulkner Award. He is currently at work on a novel, a portion of which appeared in* Harper's *under the title "Pafko at the Wall." He has written two plays,* The Engineer of Moonlight *(1979) and* The Day Room *(1986).*

This interview began in the fall of 1992 as a series of tape-recorded conversations. Transcripts were made from eight hours of taped material. DeLillo returned the final, edited manuscript with a note that begins, "This is not only the meat but the potatos."

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INTERVIEWER

Do you have any idea what made you a writer?

DELILLO

I have an idea but I'm not sure I believe it. Maybe I wanted to learn how to think. Writing is a concentrated form of thinking. I don't know what I think about certain subjects, even today, until I sit down and try to write about them. Maybe I wanted to find more rigorous ways of thinking. We're talking now about the earliest writing I did and about the power of language to counteract the wallow of late adolescence, to define things, define muddled experience in economical ways. Let's not forget that writing is convenient. It requires the simplest tools. A young writer sees that with words and sentences on a piece of paper that costs less than a penny he can place himself more clearly in the world. Words on a page, that's all it takes to help him separate himself from the forces around him, streets and people and pressures and feelings. He learns to think about these things, to ride his own sentences into new perceptions. How much of this did I feel at the time? Maybe just an inkling, an instinct. Writing was mainly an unnameable urge, an urge partly propelled by the writers I was reading at the time.

INTERVIEWER

Did you read as a child?

DELILLO

No, not at all. Comic books. This is probably why I don't have a storytelling drive, a drive to follow a certain kind of narrative rhythm.

INTERVIEWER

As a teenager?

DELILLO

Not much at first. *Dracula* when I was fourteen. A spider eats a fly, and a rat eats the spider, and a cat eats the rat, and

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a dog eats the cat, and maybe somebody eats the dog. Did I miss one level of devouring? And yes, the *Studs Lonigan* trilogy, which showed me that my own life, or something like it, could be the subject of a writer's scrutiny. This was an amazing thing to discover. Then, when I was eighteen, I got a summer job as a playground attendant—a parkie. And I was told to wear a white T-shirt and brown pants and brown shoes and a whistle around my neck—which they provided, the whistle. But I never acquired the rest of the outfit. I wore blue jeans and checkered shirts and kept the whistle in my pocket and just sat on a park bench disguised as an ordinary citizen. And this is where I read Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying* and *Light in August*. And got paid for it. And then James Joyce, and it was through Joyce that I learned to see something in language that carried a radiance, something that made me feel the beauty and fervor of words, the sense that a word has a life and a history. And I'd look at a sentence in *Ulysses* or in *Moby-Dick* or in Hemingway—maybe I hadn't gotten to *Ulysses* at that point, it was *Portrait of the Artist*—but certainly Hemingway and the water that was clear and swiftly moving and the way the troops went marching down the road and raised dust that powdered the leaves of the trees. All this in a playground in the Bronx.

INTERVIEWER

Does the fact that you grew up in an Italian-American household translate in some way, does it show up in the novels you've published?

DELILLO

It showed up in early short stories. I think it translates to the novels only in the sense that it gave me a perspective from which to see the larger environment. It's no accident that my first novel was called *Americana*. This was a private declaration of independence, a statement of my intention to use the whole picture, the whole culture. America was and is the immigrant's dream, and as the son of two immigrants I was attracted by

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the sense of possibility that had drawn my grandparents and parents. This was a subject that would allow me to develop a range I hadn't shown in those early stories—a range and a freedom. And I was well into my twenties by this point and had long since left the streets where I'd grown up. Not left them forever—I do want to write about those years. It's just a question of finding the right frame.

INTERVIEWER

What got you started on *Americana*?

DELILLO

I don't always know when or where an idea first hits the nervous system, but I remember *Americana*. I was sailing in Maine with two friends, and we put into a small harbor on Mt. Desert Island. And I was sitting on a railroad tie waiting to take a shower, and I had a glimpse of a street maybe fifty yards away and a sense of beautiful old houses and rows of elms and maples and a stillness and wistfulness—the street seemed to carry its own built-in longing. And I felt something, a pause, something opening up before me. It would be a month or two before I started writing the book and two or three years before I came up with the title *Americana*, but in fact it was all implicit in that moment—a moment in which nothing happened, nothing ostensibly changed, a moment in which I didn't see anything I hadn't seen before. But there was a pause in time, and I knew I had to write about a man who comes to a street like this or lives on a street like this. And whatever roads the novel eventually followed, I believe I maintained the idea of that quiet street if only as counterpoint, as lost innocence.

INTERVIEWER

Do you think it made a difference in your career that you started writing novels late, when you were approaching thirty?

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DELILLO

Well, I wish I had started earlier, but evidently I wasn't ready. First, I lacked ambition. I may have had novels in my head but very little on paper and no personal goals, no burning desire to achieve some end. Second, I didn't have a sense of what it takes to be a serious writer. It took me a long time to develop this. Even when I was well into my first novel I didn't have a system for working, a dependable routine. I worked haphazardly, sometimes late at night, sometimes in the afternoon. I spent too much time doing other things or nothing at all. On humid summer nights I tracked horseflies through the apartment and killed them—not for the meat but because they were driving me crazy with their buzzing. I hadn't developed a sense of the level of dedication that's necessary to do this kind of work.

INTERVIEWER

What are your working habits now?

DELILLO

I work in the morning at a manual typewriter. I do about four hours and then go running. This helps me shake off one world and enter another. Trees, birds, drizzle—it's a nice kind of interlude. Then I work again, later afternoon, for two or three hours. Back into book time, which is transparent—you don't know it's passing. No snack food or coffee. No cigarettes—I stopped smoking a long time ago. The space is clear, the house is quiet. A writer takes earnest measures to secure his solitude and then finds endless ways to squander it. Looking out the window, reading random entries in the dictionary. To break the spell I look at a photograph of Borges, a great picture sent to me by the Irish writer Colm Tóibín. The face of Borges against a dark background—Borges fierce, blind, his nostrils gaping, his skin stretched taut, his mouth amazingly vivid; his mouth looks painted; he's like a shaman painted for visions, and the whole face has a kind of steely rapture. I've read Borges of course, although not nearly all of it, and

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I don't know anything about the way he worked—but the photograph shows us a writer who did not waste time at the window or anywhere else. So I've tried to make him my guide out of lethargy and drift, into the otherworld of magic, art and divination.

INTERVIEWER

Do your typed drafts just pile up and sit around?

DELILLO

That's right. I want those pages nearby because there's always a chance I'll have to refer to something that's scrawled at the bottom of a sheet of paper somewhere. Discarded pages mark the physical dimensions of a writer's labor—you know, how many shots it took to get a certain paragraph right. Or the awesome accumulation, the gross tonnage, of first draft pages. The first draft of *Libra* sits in ten manuscript boxes. I like knowing it's in the house. I feel connected to it. It's the complete book, the full experience containable on paper. I find I'm more ready to discard pages than I used to be. I used to look for things to keep. I used to find ways to save a paragraph or a sentence, maybe by relocating it. Now I look for ways to discard things. If I discard a sentence I like, it's almost as satisfying as keeping a sentence I like. I don't think I've become ruthless or perverse—just a bit more willing to believe that nature will restore itself. The instinct to discard is finally a kind of faith. It tells me there's a better way to do this page even though the evidence is not accessible at the present time.

INTERVIEWER

Athletes—basketball players, football players—talk about "getting into the zone." Is there a writer's zone you get into?

DELILLO

There's a zone I aspire to. Finding it is another question. It's a state of automatic writing, and it represents the paradox that's at the center of a writer's consciousness—this writer's

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anyway. First you look for discipline and control. You want to exercise your will, bend the language your way, bend the world your way. You want to control the flow of impulses, images, words, faces, ideas. But there's a higher place, a secret aspiration. You want to let go. You want to lose yourself in language, become a carrier or messenger. The best moments involve a loss of control. It's a kind of rapture, and it can happen with words and phrases fairly often—completely surprising combinations that make a higher kind of sense, that come to you out of nowhere. But rarely for extended periods, for paragraphs and pages—I think poets must have more access to this state than novelists do. In *End Zone* a number of characters play a game of touch football in a snowstorm. There's nothing rapturous or magical about the writing. The writing is simple. But I wrote the passage, maybe five or six pages, in a state of pure momentum, without the slightest pause or deliberation.

INTERVIEWER

How do you imagine your audience?

DELILLO

When my head is in the typewriter the last thing on my mind is some imaginary reader. I don't have an audience; I have a set of standards. But when I think of my work out in the world, written and published, I like to imagine it's being read by some stranger somewhere who doesn't have anyone around him to talk to about books and writing—maybe a would-be writer, maybe a little lonely, who depends on a certain kind of writing to make him feel more comfortable in the world.

INTERVIEWER

I've read critics who say that your books are bound to make people feel uncomfortable.

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DELILLO

Well, that's good to know. But this reader we're talking about—he already feels uncomfortable. He's very uncomfortable. And maybe what he needs is a book that will help him realize he's not alone.

INTERVIEWER

How do you begin? What are the raw materials of a story?

DELILLO

I think the scene comes first, an idea of a character in a place. It's visual, it's Technicolor—something I see in a vague way. Then sentence by sentence into the breach. No outlines—maybe a short list of items, chronological, that may represent the next twenty pages. But the basic work is built around the sentence. This is what I mean when I call myself a writer. I construct sentences. There's a rhythm I hear that drives me through a sentence. And the words typed on the white page have a sculptural quality. They form odd correspondences. They match up not just through meaning but through sound and look. The rhythm of a sentence will accommodate a certain number of syllables. One syllable too many, I look for another word. There's always another word that means nearly the same thing, and if it doesn't then I'll consider altering the meaning of a sentence to keep the rhythm, the syllable beat. I'm completely willing to let language press meaning upon me. Watching the way in which words match up, keeping the balance in a sentence—these are sensuous pleasures. I might want *very* and *only* in the same sentence, spaced a particular way, exactly so far apart. I might want *rapture* matched with *danger*—I like to match word endings. I type rather than write longhand because I like the way the words and letters look when they come off the hammers onto the page—finished, printed, beautifully formed.

INTERVIEWER

Do you care about paragraphs?

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DELILLO

When I was working on *The Names* I devised a new method—new to me, anyway. When I finished a paragraph, even a three-line paragraph, I automatically went to a fresh page to start the new paragraph. No crowded pages. This enabled me to see a given set of sentences more clearly. It made rewriting easier and more effective. The white space on the page helped me concentrate more deeply on what I'd written. And with this book I tried to find a deeper level of seriousness as well. *The Names* is the book that marks the beginning of a new dedication. I needed the invigoration of unfamiliar languages and new landscapes, and I worked to find a clarity of prose that might serve as an equivalent to the clear light of those Aegean islands. The Greeks made an art of the alphabet, a visual art, and I studied the shapes of letters carved on stones all over Athens. This gave me fresh energy and forced me to think more deeply about what I was putting on the page. Some of the work I did in the 1970s was off-the-cuff, not powerfully motivated. I think I forced my way into a couple of books that weren't begging to be written, or maybe I was writing too fast. Since then I've tried to be patient, to wait for a subject to take me over, become part of my life beyond the desk and typewriter. *Libra* was a great experience that continues to resonate in my mind because of the fascinating and tragic lives that were part of the story. And *The Names* keeps resonating because of the languages I heard and read and touched and tried to speak and spoke a little and because of the sunlight and the elemental landscapes that I tried to blend into the book's sentences and paragraphs.

INTERVIEWER

Your dialogue is different from other people's dialogue.

DELILLO

Well, there are fifty-two ways to write dialogue that's faithful to the way people speak. And then there are times when you're not trying to be faithful. I've done it different ways

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myself and I think I concentrated on dialogue most deeply in *Players*. It's hyperrealistic, spoken by urban men and women who live together, who know each other's speech patterns and thought patterns and finish each other's sentences or don't even bother because it isn't necessary. Jumpy, edgy, a bit hostile, dialogue that's almost obsessive about being funny whatever the circumstances. New York voices.

INTERVIEWER

Has the way you handle dialogue evolved?

DELILLO

It has evolved, but maybe sideways. I don't have a grand, unified theory. I think about dialogue differently from book to book. In *The Names* I raised the level of intelligence and perception. People speak a kind of idealized café dialogue. In *Libra* I flattened things out. The characters are bigger and broader, the dialogue is flatter. There were times with Oswald, with his marine buddies and with his wife and mother when I used a documentary approach. They speak the flat prose of *The Warren Report.*

INTERVIEWER

You mentioned early short stories. Do you ever write stories anymore?

DELILLO

Fewer all the time.

INTERVIEWER

Could the set piece—I'm thinking of the Unification Church wedding in *Mao II* or the in-flight movie in *Players*—be your alternative to the short story?

INTERVIEWER

I don't think of them that way. What attracts me to this format is its non-short-storyness, the high degree of styliza-

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tion. In *Players* all the major characters in the novel appear in the prologue—embryonically, not yet named or defined. They're shadowy people watching a movie on an airplane. This piece is the novel in miniature. It lies outside the novel. It's modular—keep it in or take it out. The mass wedding in *Mao II* is more conventional. It introduces a single major character and sets up themes and resonances. The book makes no sense without it.

INTERVIEWER

We talked a little about *Americana*. Tell me about your second novel—what was your idea for the shape of *End Zone*?

DELILLO

I don't think I had an idea. I had a setting and some characters, and I more or less trailed behind, listening. At some point I realized there had to be a structural core, and I decided to play a football game. This became the centerpiece of the novel. The same thing happens in *White Noise*. There's an aimless shuffle toward a high-intensity event—this time a toxic spill that forces people to evacuate their homes. Then, in each book, there's a kind of decline, a purposeful loss of energy. Otherwise I think the two books are quite different. *End Zone* is about games—war, language, football. In *White Noise* there is less language and more human dread. There's a certain equation at work. As technology advances in complexity and scope, fear becomes more primitive.

INTERVIEWER

Plot, in the shape of shadowy conspiracy, shows up for the first time in your third novel, *Great Jones Street*. What brought you to write about the idea of a mysterious drug possibly tied to government repression?

DELILLO

It was in the air. It was the way people were thinking. Those were the days when the enemy was some presence seeping out

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of the government, and the most paranoid sort of fear was indistinguishable from common sense. I think I tried to get at the slickness connected with the word *paranoia*. It was becoming a kind of commodity. It used to mean one thing and after a while it began to mean everything. It became something you bought into, like Club Med.

INTERVIEWER

Were you looking for a plot?

DELILLO

I think the plot found me. In a book about fear and paranoia, a plot was bound to assert itself. It's not the tightest sort of plotting—more like drug fantasies, seeing dead relatives come out of the walls. What we finally have is a man in a small room, a man who has shut himself away, and this is something that happens in my work—the man hiding from acts of violence or planning acts of violence, or the individual reduced to silence by the forces around him.

INTERVIEWER

The most lyrical language in *Great Jones Street* is reserved for the last chapter. Bucky Wunderlick, deprived of the faculty of speech, is wandering the streets of lower Manhattan. Why did you apply such poetic beauty to these scenes of dereliction?

DELILLO

I think this is how urban people react to the deteriorating situation around them—I think we need to invent beauty, search out some restoring force. A writer may describe the ugliness and pain in graphic terms but he can also try to find a dignity and significance in ruined parts of the city, and the people he sees there. Ugly and beautiful—this is part of the tension of *Great Jones Street*. When I was working on the book there were beggars and derelicts in parts of the city they'd never entered before. A sense of failed souls and forgotten lives on a new scale. And the place began to feel a little like

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a community in the Middle Ages. Disease on the streets, insane people talking to themselves, the drug culture spreading among the young. We're talking about the very early 1970s, and I remember thinking of New York as a European city in the fourteenth century. Maybe this is why I was looking for a ruined sort of grandeur in the language at the end of the book.

INTERVIEWER

There's a three-year period between *Great Jones Street* and your next book, *Ratner's Star*. Did it take you all that time to write it?

DELILLO

It took a little over two years of extremely concentrated work. I'm amazed now that I was able to do the book in that period of time. I was drawn to the beauty of scientific language, the mystery of numbers, the idea of pure mathematics as a secret history and secret language—and to the notion of a fourteen-year-old mathematical genius at the center of all this. I guess it's also a book of games, mathematics being chief among them. It's a book in which structure predominates. The walls, the armature, the foundation—I wandered inside this thing I was building and sometimes felt taken over by it, not so much lost inside it as helpless to prevent the thing from building new connections, new underground links.

INTERVIEWER

What got you so interested in mathematics?

DELILLO

Mathematics is underground knowledge. Only the actual practitioners know the terms and references. And I was drawn to the idea of a novel about an enormously important field of human thought that remains largely unknown. But I had to enter as a novice, a jokesmith, with a certain sly deference. I had to sneak up on my subject. No other book I've done

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was at the same time such fun and such labor. And all the time I was writing the book I was writing a shadow book in another part of my mind—same story, same main character but a small book, a book the size of a children's book, maybe it *was* a children's book, less structure, less weight—four characters instead of eighty-four or a hundred and four.

INTERVIEWER

What you actually wrote is very different from your first three books.

DELILLO

Somebody said that *Ratner's Star* is the monster at the center of my work. But maybe it's in orbit around the other books. I think the other books constitute a single compact unit and that *Ratner's Star* swings in orbit around this unit at a very great distance.

INTERVIEWER

Your next book was *Players*.

DELILLO

Structure again but in a completely different way. Structure as something people need in their lives. It's about double lives. The second life is not only the secret life. It's the more structured life. People need rules and boundaries, and if society doesn't provide them in sufficient measure, the estranged individual may drift into something deeper and more dangerous. Terrorism is built on structure. A terrorist act is a structured narrative played out over days or weeks or even years if there are hostages involved. What we call the shadow life of terrorists or gun runners or double agents is in fact the place where a certain clarity takes effect, where definitions matter, and both sides tend to follow the same set of rules.

INTERVIEWER

Owen Brademas, a character in *The Names*, makes some interesting remarks about the novel. At one point he says, "If

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I were a writer, how would I enjoy being told the novel is dead. How liberating to work in the margins outside the central perception. You are the ghoul of literature."

DELILLO

The novel's not dead, it's not even seriously injured, but I do think we're working in the margins, working in the shadows of the novel's greatness and influence. There's plenty of impressive talent around, and there's strong evidence that younger writers are moving into history, finding broader themes. But when we talk about the novel we have to consider the culture in which it operates. Everything in the culture argues against the novel, particularly the novel that tries to be equal to the complexities and excesses of the culture. This is why books such as *JR* and *Harlot's Ghost* and *Gravity's Rainbow* and *The Public Burning* are important—to name just four. They offer many pleasures without making concessions to the middle-range reader, and they absorb and incorporate the culture instead of catering to it. And there's the work of Robert Stone and Joan Didion, who are both writers of conscience and painstaking workers of the sentence and paragraph. I don't want to list names because lists are a form of cultural hysteria, but I have to mention *Blood Meridian* for its beauty and its honor. These books and writers show us that the novel is still spacious enough and brave enough to encompass enormous areas of experience. We have a rich literature. But sometimes it's a literature too ready to be neutralized, to be incorporated into the ambient noise. This is why we need the writer in opposition, the novelist who writes against power, who writes against the corporation or the state or the whole apparatus of assimilation. We're all one beat away from becoming elevator music.

INTERVIEWER

Could you tell me about the passage in *White Noise* in which Jack listens to his daughter Steffie talking in her sleep, and she is repeating the words *Toyota Celica*?

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DELILLO

There's something nearly mystical about certain words and phrases that float through our lives. It's computer mysticism. Words that are computer generated to be used on products that might be sold anywhere from Japan to Denmark—words devised to be pronounceable in a hundred languages. And when you detach one of these words from the product it was designed to serve, the word acquires a chantlike quality. Years ago somebody decided—I don't know how this conclusion was reached—that the most beautiful phrase in the English language was *cellar door*. If you concentrate on the sound, if you disassociate the words from the object they denote, and if you say the words over and over, they become a sort of higher Esperanto. This is how *Toyota Celica* began its life. It was pure chant at the beginning. Then they had to find an object to accommodate the words.

INTERVIEWER

Tell me about the research you did for *Libra*.

DELILLO

There were several levels of research—fiction writer's research. I was looking for ghosts, not living people. I went to New Orleans, Dallas, Fort Worth and Miami and looked at houses and streets and hospitals, schools and libraries—this is mainly Oswald I'm tracking but others as well—and after a while the characters in my mind and in my notebooks came out into the world.

Then there were books, old magazines, old photographs, scientific reports, material printed by obscure presses, material my wife turned up from relatives in Texas. And a guy in Canada with a garage full of amazing stuff—audiotapes of Oswald talking on a radio program, audiotapes of his mother reading from his letters. And I looked at film consisting of amateur footage shot in Dallas on the day of the assassination, crude powerful footage that included the Zapruder film. And there were times when I felt an eerie excitement, coming across

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an item that seemed to bear out my own theories. Anyone who enters this maze knows you have to become part scientist, novelist, biographer, historian and existential detective. The landscape was crawling with secrets, and this novel-in-progress was my own precious secret—I told very few people what I was doing.

Then there was *The Warren Report*, which is the *Oxford English Dictionary* of the assassination and also the Joycean novel. This is the one document that captures the full richness and madness and meaning of the event, despite the fact that it omits about a ton and a half of material. I'm not an obsessive researcher, and I think I read maybe half of *The Warren Report*, which totals twenty-six volumes. There are acres of FBI reports I barely touched. But for me the boring and meaningless stretches are part of the experience. This is what a life resembles in its starkest form—school records, lists of possessions, photographs of knotted string found in a kitchen drawer. It took seven seconds to kill the president, and we're still collecting evidence and sifting documents and finding people to talk to and working through the trivia. The trivia is exceptional. When I came across the dental records of Jack Ruby's mother I felt a surge of admiration. Did they really put this in? The testimony of witnesses was a great resource—period language, regional slang, the twisted syntax of Marguerite Oswald and others as a kind of improvised genius and the lives of trainmen and stripteasers and telephone clerks. I had to be practical about this, and so I resisted the urge to read everything.

INTERVIEWER

When *Libra* came out, I had the feeling that this was a magnum opus, a life accomplishment. Did you know what you would do next?

DELILLO

I thought I would be haunted by this story and these characters for some time to come, and that turned out to be true.

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But it didn't affect the search for new material, the sense that it was time to start thinking about a new book. *Libra* will have a lingering effect on me partly because I became so deeply involved in the story and partly because the story doesn't have an end out here in the world beyond the book—new theories, new suspects and new documents keep turning up. It will never end. And there's no reason it should end. At the time of the twenty-fifth anniversary one newspaper titled its story about the assassination "The Day America Went Crazy." About the same time I became aware of three rock groups—or maybe two rock groups and a folk group—touring at the same time: the Oswalds, the Jack Rubies and the Dead Kennedys.

INTERVIEWER

How do you normally feel at the end of writing a novel? Are you disgusted with what you've done? Pleased?

DELILLO

I'm usually happy to finish and uncertain about what I've done. This is where you have to depend on other people, editors, friends, other readers. But the strangest thing that happened to me at the end of a book concerns *Libra*. I had a photograph of Oswald propped on a makeshift bookshelf on my desk, the photo in which he holds a rifle and some left-wing journals. It was there for nearly the entire time I was working on the book, about three years and three months. When I reached the last sentence—a sentence whose precise wording I knew long before I reached the final page, a sentence I'd been eager to get to and which, when I finally got to it, I probably typed at a faster than usual rate, feeling the deepest sort of relief and satisfaction—the picture started sliding off the shelf, and I had to pause to catch it.

INTERVIEWER

There was a passage in a critical work about you that disturbed me a bit—I don't know if it came from an interview

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you gave or just a supposition on the writer's part—in which it was claimed that you don't particularly care about your characters.

DELILLO

A character is part of the pleasure a writer wants to give his readers. A character who lives, who says interesting things. I want to give pleasure through language, through the architecture of a book or a sentence and through characters who may be funny, nasty, violent or all of these. But I'm not the kind of writer who dotes on certain characters and wants readers to do the same. The fact is every writer likes his characters to the degree that he's able to work out their existence. You invent a character who pushes his mother down a flight of stairs, say. She's an old lady in a wheelchair and your character comes home drunk and pushes her down a long flight of stairs. Do you automatically dislike this man? He's done an awful thing. But I don't believe it's that simple. Your feelings toward this character depend on whether or not you've realized him fully, whether you understand him. It's not a simple question of like or dislike. And you don't necessarily show your feelings toward a character in the same way you show feelings to real people. In *Mao II* I felt enormous sympathy toward Karen Janney, sympathy, understanding, kinship. I was able to enter her consciousness quickly and easily. And I tried to show this sympathy and kinship through the language I used when writing from her viewpoint—a free-flowing, non-sequitur ramble that's completely different from the other characters' viewpoints. Karen is not especially likable. But once I'd given her a life independent of my own will, I had no choice but to like her—although it's simplistic to put it that way—and it shows in the sentences I wrote, which are free of the usual constraints that bind words to a sentence in a certain way.

INTERVIEWER

Did you try with *Libra* for a larger audience than you had achieved at the time of *The Names*?

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DELILLO

I wouldn't know how to do that. My mind works one way, toward making a simple moment complex, and this is not the way to gain a larger audience. I think I have the audience my work ought to have. It's not easy work. And you have to understand that I started writing novels fairly late and with low expectations. I didn't even think of myself as a writer until I was two years into my first novel. When I was struggling with that book I felt unlucky, unblessed by the fates and by the future, and almost everything that has happened since then has proved me wrong. So some of my natural edginess and pessimism has been tempered by acceptance. This hasn't softened the tone of my work—it has simply made me realize I've had a lucky life as a writer.

INTERVIEWER

I can see how *Mao II* would come naturally out of *Libra* from a thematic point of view—the terrorist and the man in the small room. But I'm curious as to why, after *Libra*, you went back to the shape and feel of your previous novels. There's something about the wandering in *Mao II* that goes back to *Players* or *Running Dog*.

DELILLO

The bare structure of *Mao II* is similar to the way *Players* is set up, including a prologue and an epilogue. But *Mao II* is a sort of rest-and-motion book, to invent a category. The first half of the book could have been called "The Book." Bill Gray talking about his book, piling up manuscript pages, living in a house that operates as a kind of filing cabinet for his work and all the other work it engenders. And the second half of the book could have been called "The World." Here, Bill escapes his book and enters the world. It turns out to be the world of political violence. I was nearly finished with the first half of the book before I realized how the second half ought to be shaped. I was writing blind. It was a struggle up to that point, but once I understood that Bill had to escape

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his handlers—the most obvious things tend to take the form of startling revelations—I felt a surge of excitement because the book had finally revealed itself to me.

INTERVIEWER

We talked briefly about men in small rooms. Bill Gray the writer. Lee Oswald the plotter. Owen Brademas in the old city of Lahore. Bucky Wunderlick blown off the concert stage and hiding out. But what about the crowd? "The future belongs to crowds," you wrote in *Mao II*. That sentence gets quoted a lot.

DELILLO

In *Mao II* I thought about the secluded writer, the arch individualist, living outside the glut of the image world. And then the crowd, many kinds of crowds, people in soccer stadiums, people gathered around enormous photographs of holy men or heads of state. This book is an argument about the future. Who wins the struggle for the imagination of the world? There was a time when the inner world of the novelist—Kafka's private vision and maybe Beckett's—eventually folded into the three-dimensional world we were all living in. These men wrote a kind of world narrative. And so did Joyce in another sense. Joyce turned the book into a world with *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*. Today, the world has become a book—more precisely a news story or television show or piece of film footage. And the world narrative is being written by men who orchestrate disastrous events, by military leaders, totalitarian leaders, terrorists, men dazed by power. World news is the novel people want to read. It carries the tragic narrative that used to belong to the novel. The crowds in *Mao II*, except for the mass wedding, are TV crowds, masses of people we see in news coverage of terrible events. The news has been full of crowds, and the TV audience represents another kind of crowd. The crowd broken down into millions of small rooms.

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INTERVIEWER

One of the funnier moments in *Mao II*—it's a typically grim funny moment—is when Bill Gray has been run over by a car, and he approaches a group of veterinarians to try to determine the extent of his damage. Where did that come from?

DELILLO

I said something earlier about going from simple to complex moments. This is one of those instances. I wanted to reveal the seriousness of Bill Gray's physical condition, but it seemed ridiculously simple to have him walk into a doctor's office. Partly because he didn't want to see a doctor—he feared the blunt truth—but mainly because I wanted to do something more interesting. So I took an indirect route and hoped for certain riches along the way. I wanted to make basic medical information an occasion for comic dialogue and for an interesting play of levels. What I mean is that Bill pretends to be a writer—of course, he *is* a writer—doing research on a medical matter he wants to put into his book. This happens to be exactly what I did before writing the passage. I talked to a doctor about the kind of injury Bill suffered when the car hit him and what the consequences might be and how the effects of the injury might manifest themselves. And I played his answers back through the medium of three tipsy British veterinarians trying to oblige a stranger who may actually be gravely ill and isn't sure how he feels about it. Bill the writer becomes his own character. He tries to shade the information, soften it a bit, by establishing a kind of fiction. He needs this for a book, he tells them, but it turned out to be my book, not his.

INTERVIEWER

There are a number of characters in your work who discover that they are going to die sooner than they thought, though they don't know exactly when. Bucky Wunderlick isn't going to die, but he's been given something awful, and for all he knows the side effects are deadly; Jack Gladney, poisoned by the toxic spill, is another obvious example; and then we come

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to Bill Gray with his automobile accident. What does this accelerated but vague mortality mean?

DELILLO

Who knows? If writing is a concentrated form of thinking, then the most concentrated writing probably ends in some kind of reflection on dying. This is what we eventually confront if we think long enough and hard enough.

INTERVIEWER

Could it be related to the idea in *Libra* that—

DELILLO

—all plots lead toward death? I guess that's possible. It happens in *Libra*, and it happens in *White Noise*, which doesn't necessarily mean that these are highly plotted novels. *Libra* has many digressions and meditations, and Oswald's life just meanders along for much of the book. It's the original plotter, Win Everett, who wonders if his conspiracy might grow tentacles that will turn an assassination *scare* into an actual murder, and of course this is what happens. The plot extends its own logic to the ultimate point. And *White Noise* develops a trite adultery plot that enmeshes the hero, justifying his fears about the death energies contained in plots. When I think of highly plotted novels I think of detective fiction or mystery fiction, the kind of work that always produces a few dead bodies. But these bodies are basically plot points, not worked-out characters. The book's plot either moves inexorably toward a dead body or flows directly from it, and the more artificial the situation the better. Readers can play off their fears by encountering the death experience in a superficial way. A mystery novel localizes the awesome force of the real death outside the book, winds it tightly in a plot, makes it less fearful by containing it in a kind of game format.

INTERVIEWER

You've said that you didn't think your books could be written in the world that existed before the Kennedy assassination.

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DELILLO

Our culture changed in important ways. And these changes are among the things that go into my work. There's the shattering randomness of the event, the missing motive, the violence that people not only commit but seem to watch simultaneously from a disinterested distance. Then the uncertainty we feel about the basic facts that surround the case—number of gunmen, number of shots and so on. Our grip on reality has felt a little threatened. Every revelation about the event seems to produce new levels of secrecy, unexpected links, and I guess this has been part of my work, the clandestine mentality—how ordinary people spy on themselves, how the power centers operate and manipulate. Our postwar history has seen tanks in the streets and occasional massive force. But mainly we have the individual in the small room, the nobody who walks out of the shadows and changes everything. That week in Maine, that street I saw that made me think I had to write a novel—well, I bought a newspaper the same day or maybe later in the week, and there was a story about Charles Whitman, the young man who went to the top of a tower in Austin, Texas and shot and killed over a dozen people and wounded about thirty more. Took a number of guns up there with him. Took supplies with him, ready for a long siege, including underarm deodorant. And I remember thinking, Texas again. And also, underarm deodorant. That was my week in Maine.

INTERVIEWER

One of the other things that's very important in *Libra* is the existence of a filmed version of the assassination. One of the points you make is that television didn't really come into its own until it filmed Oswald's murder. Is it possible that one of the things that marks you as a writer is that you're a post-television writer?

DELILLO

Kennedy was shot on film, Oswald was shot on TV. Does this mean anything? Maybe only that Oswald's death became

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instantly repeatable. It belonged to everyone. The Zapruder film, the film of Kennedy's death, was sold and hoarded and doled out very selectively. It was exclusive footage. So that the social differences continued to pertain, the hierarchy held fast—you could watch Oswald die while you ate a TV dinner, and he was still dying by the time you went to bed, but if you wanted to see the Zapruder film you had to be very important or you had to wait until the 1970s when I believe it was shown once on television, or you had to pay somebody thirty thousand dollars to look at it—I think that's the going rate.

The Zapruder film is a home movie that runs about eighteen seconds and could probably fuel college courses in a dozen subjects from history to physics. And every new generation of technical experts gets to take a crack at the Zapruder film. The film represents all the hopefulness we invest in technology. A new enhancement technique or a new computer analysis—not only of Zapruder but of other key footage and still photographs—will finally tell us precisely what happened.

INTERVIEWER

I read it exactly the opposite way, which may be also what you're getting around to. It's one of the great ironies that, despite the existence of the film, we don't know what happened.

DELILLO

We're still in the dark. What we finally have are patches and shadows. It's still a mystery. There's still an element of dream-terror. And one of the terrible dreams is that our most photogenic president is murdered on film. But there's something inevitable about the Zapruder film. It had to happen this way. The moment belongs to the twentieth century, which means it had to be captured on film.

INTERVIEWER

Can we even go further and say that part of the confusion is created by the film? After all, if the film didn't exist it would be much harder to posit a conspiracy theory.

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DELILLO

I think every emotion we felt is part of that film, and certainly confusion is one of the larger ones, yes. Confusion and horror. The head shot is like some awful, pornographic moment that happens without warning in our living rooms—some truth about the world, some unspeakable activity people engage in that we don't want to know about. And after the confusion about when Kennedy is first hit, and when Connally is hit, and why the president's wife is scrambling over the seat, and simultaneous with the horror of the head shot, part of the horror, perhaps—there's a bolt of revelation. Because the head shot is the most direct kind of statement that the lethal bullet was fired from the front. Whatever the physical possibilities concerning impact and reflex, you look at this thing and wonder what's going on. Are you seeing some distortion inherent in the film medium or in your own perception of things? Are you the willing victim of some enormous lie of the state—a lie, a wish, a dream? Or, did the shot simply come from the front, as every cell in your body tells you it did?

INTERVIEWER

From David Bell making a film about himself in *Americana* to the Führer-bunker porno film in *Running Dog*, to the filmmaker Volterra's mini-lecture in *The Names*, you return incessantly to the subject of movies. "The twentieth century is on film," you wrote in *The Names*, it's "the filmed century."

DELILLO

Film allows us to examine ourselves in ways earlier societies could not—examine ourselves, imitate ourselves, extend ourselves, reshape our reality. It permeates our lives, this double vision, and also detaches us, turns some of us into actors doing walk-throughs. In my work, film and television are often linked with disaster. Because this is one of the energies that charges the culture. TV has a sort of panting lust for bad news and calamity as long as it is visual. We've reached the point where things exist so they can be filmed and played and re-

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played. Some people may have had the impression that the Gulf War was made for television. And when the Pentagon censored close coverage, people became depressed. All that euphoria drifting through the country suddenly collapsed—not because we weren't winning but because they'd taken away our combat footage. Think about the images most often repeated. The Rodney King videotape or the Challenger disaster or Ruby shooting Oswald. These are the images that connect us the way Betty Grable used to connect us in her white swimsuit, looking back at us over her shoulder in the famous pinup. And they play the tape again and again and again and again. This is the world narrative, so they play it until everyone in the world has seen it.

INTERVIEWER

Frank Lentricchia refers to you as the type of writer who believes that the shape and fate of the culture dictates the shape and fate of the self.

DELILLO

Yes, and maybe we can think about *Running Dog* in this respect. This book is not exactly about obsession—it's about the marketing of obsession. Obsession as a product that you offer to the highest bidder or the most enterprising and reckless fool, which is sort of the same thing in this particular book. Maybe this novel is a response to the war in Vietnam—this is what I'm getting at—and how the war affected the way people worked out their own strategies, how individuals conducted their own lives. There's a rampant need among the characters, a driving urge that certain characters feel to acquire the book's sacred object, a home movie made in Hitler's bunker. All the paranoia, manipulation, violence, all the sleazy desires are a form of fallout from the Vietnam experience. And in *Libra*, of course—here we have Oswald watching TV, Oswald working the bolt of his rifle, Oswald imagining that he and the president are quite similar in many ways. I see Oswald, back from Russia, as a man surrounded by promises of

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fulfillment—consumer fulfillment, personal fulfillment. But he's poor, unstable, cruel to his wife, barely employable—a man who has to enter his own Hollywood movie to see who he is and how he must direct his fate. This is the force of the culture and the power of the image. And this is also a story we've seen updated through the years. It's the story of the disaffected young man who suspects there are sacred emanations flowing from the media heavens and who feels the only way to enter this holy vortex is through some act of violent theater. I think Oswald was a person who lost his faith—his faith in politics and in the possibility of change—and who entered the last months of his life not very different from the media-poisoned boys who would follow.

INTERVIEWER

In *The New York Review of Books* you were dubbed "the chief shaman of the paranoid school of American fiction." What does this title mean to you, if anything?

DELILLO

I realize this is a title one might wear honorably. But I'm not sure I've earned it. Certainly there's an element of paranoia in my work—*Libra*, yes, although not nearly so much as some people think. In this book the element of chance and coincidence may be as strong as the sense of an engineered history. History is engineered after the assassination, not before. *Running Dog* and *Great Jones Street* may also have a paranoid sheen. But I'm not particularly paranoid myself. I've drawn this element out of the air around me, and it was a stronger force in the sixties and seventies than it is now. The important thing about the paranoia in my characters is that it operates as a form of religious awe. It's something old, a leftover from some forgotten part of the soul. And the intelligence agencies that create and service this paranoia are not interesting to me as spy handlers or masters of espionage. They represent old mysteries and fascinations, ineffable things. Central intelligence. They're like churches that hold the final secrets.

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INTERVIEWER

It's been said that you have an "ostentatiously gloomy view of American society."

DELILLO

I don't agree, but I can understand how a certain kind of reader would see the gloomy side of things. My work doesn't offer the comforts of other kinds of fiction, work that suggests that our lives and our problems and our perceptions are no different today than they were fifty or sixty years ago. I don't offer comforts except those that lurk in comedy and in structure and in language, and the comedy is probably not all that soothing. But before everything, there's language. Before history and politics, there's language. And it's language, the sheer pleasure of making it and bending it and seeing it form on the page and hearing it whistle in my head—this is the thing that makes my work go. And art can be exhilarating despite the darkness—and there's certainly much darker material than mine—if the reader is sensitive to the music. What I try to do is create complex human beings, ordinary-extraordinary men and women who live in the particular skin of the late twentieth century. I try to record what I see and hear and sense around me—what I feel in the currents, the electric stuff of the culture. I think these are American forces and energies. And they belong to our time.

INTERVIEWER

What have you been working on recently?

DELILLO

Sometime in late 1991 I started writing something new and didn't know what it would be—a novel, a short story, a long story. It was simply a piece of writing, and it gave me more pleasure than any other writing I've done. It turned into a novella, "Pafko at the Wall," and it appeared in *Harper's* about a year after I started it. At some point I decided I wasn't finished with the piece. I was sending signals into space and

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getting echoes back, like a dolphin or a bat. So the piece, slightly altered, is now the prologue, to a novel-in-progress, which will have a different title. And the pleasure has long since faded into the slogging reality of the no-man's-land of the long novel. But I'm still hearing the echoes.

INTERVIEWER

Do you have any plans for after the novel-in-progress?

DELILLO

Not any specific plans. But I'm aware of the fact that time is limited. Every new novel stretches the term of the contract—let me live long enough to do one more book. How many books do we get? How much good work? The actuaries of the novel say twenty years of our best work, and after that we're beachcombing for shiny stones. I don't necessarily agree, but I'm aware of fleeting time.

INTERVIEWER

Does that make you nervous?

DELILLO

No, it doesn't make me nervous, it just makes me want to write a little faster.

INTERVIEWER

But you'll keep on writing?

DELILLO

I'll keep writing something, certainly.

INTERVIEWER

I mean, you couldn't take up gardening?

DELILLO

No, no, no, no, no.

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INTERVIEWER

Handball?

DELILLO

Do you know what a Chinese killer is? It's a handball term—when you hit the ball right at the seam of the wall and the ground, and the shot is unreturnable. This used to be called a Chinese killer.

—**Adam Begley**

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Ezra Pound



Canto 72

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Ezra Pound was obsessed with language. Quotations from seventeen languages, from hieroglyphics to the dialect of the Na-Khi tribe of China are scattered through the Cantos. *Two cantos were written completely in Italian: numbers 72 and 73. It is not perfect Italian, though Pound had lived in Italy, off and on, for thirty years when he wrote the poems in Rapallo in 1944 toward the end of the war. There are minute errors of syntax and a few slight slips in verbal tone. But Pound's ear was so keen, the finest of his generation according to Yeats, it was nearly impossible for him to write a line that was not melodic.*

Let me pick out a few of Pound's Italian lines at random. It matters not if you know what they mean. Read them aloud for the subtlety of his cadences, for the melopoeia.

E poi la voce che prima furiava,
Mi disse feroce, dico feroce, ma non ostile
Anzi era paterna quasi, come chi spiega
In mezzo di battaglia che deve far un giovan'
poco esperto:
'La voglia è antica, ma la mano è nuova.
Bada! bada a me, primo ch'io torni
Nella notte.'

The poems were written in Italian for a reason that was compelling to Pound. They were, as history made them turn out, his final public endorsement of fascist doctrine, his last offering of fealty to Mussolini whom he had so fervently and rashly admired for two decades. They were intended also for broadcast over Radio Salo, the only remaining voice of the regime as the war ended. 72 and 73 were not broadcast, but they were printed in a Salo journal, Marina Republicana *in 1945.*

As to book publication, I, quite to my surprise, became involved. At one point after Pound had been committed to St. Elizabeths Hospital in Washington as incompetent to stand trial, his daughter Mary entrusted carbon copies of 72 and 73 (in Italian) to me, asking that I hold them in safekeeping in

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the New Directions safe until such time as public hostility toward her father's allegedly anti-Semitic views might abate to the point where publication would be advisable. All well and good . . . until one morning in 1973 I saw in the New York Times *a squib, datelined Rome, which said that an Italian researcher working in the fascist archives had stumbled on the copy of the two cantos which Pound had sent Il Duce. He was claiming ownership of his find, proposing to copyright the material in his own name.*

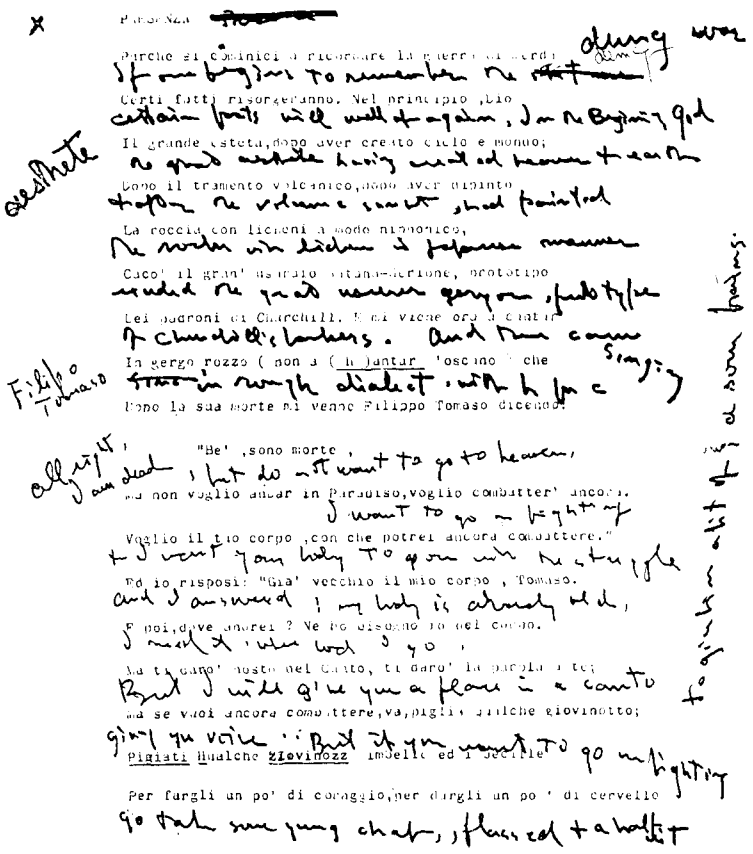
An emergency! I bought a six-pack, some sheets of heavy green cover paper, a little bottle of whitener for making corrections, and sat down at my old hit-and-miss Corona. I fitted my typed copy into twelve 5 × 8 pages, stapled them and glued the signatures into the green covers. The job was done by midnight, something that passed for a book. I took the early train down to Washington and filled out registration forms at the Copyright Office in the Library of Congress. I was back in New York in time to sell the statutory first-day copy to Ted Wilentz at the Eighth Street Bookstore and get off an express letter to Jack McClelland, the New Directions distributor in Toronto, to do whatever was necessary for a Canadian copyright.

There had always been a rumor in the Pound family that Ezra had made his own English translations of 72 and 73, but no one could find where he had stashed them. He was secretive about his manuscripts. But now 72 at least had turned up at Yale among the thousands of papers which the Beinecke Library recently purchased from the family of Olga Rudge, Pound's companion for many years. It is not known who typed the final version of 72 that appears here. The translation of Canto 73 has not yet surfaced but it's a hope for the future to complete the picture of the Italian cantos.

In Canto 72, for the first time that I recall in the poem, Pound himself stage manages the action directly. He calls up spirits from the dead, figures from ancient and modern history, instructing them how they may help to preserve the tottering fascist regime.

As with most of Pound's historical cantos, 72 is a mosaic of recondite references, often to obscure persons. And few are

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Canto 72, with Pound's handwritten English translation between the lines.

necessary. I have chosen for annotation some of them that show how Pound's mind worked by association in composing the poem. These are marked in the text by a degree sign.

A glance at the holograph page reproduced above will illuminate the translation process. The line breaks in his hand follow almost word for word the phrasing of the original Italian. He is setting up a "trot" to work from, not composing a "fresh-from-scratch" English rendition. But I can't see that this process has in any way diminished the beauty of his lines.

—James Laughlin

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If one begins to remember the dung war
certain facts will well up again.
In the beginning God
the great aesthete having created heaven and earth
& after the volcanic sunset, had painted
the rocks with lichen in Japanese manner
Exuded the great usurer Geryon,° prototype
of Churchill's bankers. And there came singing
Filippo Tomaso° in rough dialect, with h for c°
All right, I am dead, but do not want to go to heaven,
I want to go on fighting
& I want your body to go on with the struggle.
And I answered: "my body is already old,
I need it, where wd. I go?
But I will give you a place in a Canto
giving you voice. But if you want to go on fighting
go take some young chap, flaccid & a half-wit
to give him a bit of courage and some brains
to give Italy another hero among so many
Thus to be reborn & thus become a panther
& so know the second birth, & die a second time
Not old in bed,
but die to sound of trumpets
& come to Paradise. You have already done Purgatory
In the time of the collapse
Go make yourself a hero again.
And let me explain
sing of the eternal war
between light and mud.
Goodbye Marinetti
Come back and talk when you want to."

"PRESENTE!"° and after that shout, he
added sadly
"I followed vain emptiness in many ways,
show more than wisdom,
and knew not the ancient sages
nor read Confucius & Mencius°

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I sang war, and you wanted peace.
Both of us blind, me to the inner things
you the things of today
and he spoke
neither wholly to me, nor to the next man
But a part of himself talked to himself
and not to its center
and his shade grew grayer
Until another note of the scale
came from the hollow emptiness.

"The nostrils vomit spirits of flame."°

And I said: "Torquato Dazzi°
have you come?
sing a lullaby of the verses you translated
20 years ago to wake Mussato.
You making a pair with Marinetti
You wanting the past too much, he the future
Too much eagerness shoots past the mark
He wanted to clear away too much
and now we see more destruction than he wanted.
Then the first spirit impatiently
As if the news were urgent
& would not be bothered with matters of less importance
went on, & I recognized Marinetti's voice
As I had heard it in Piazza Adriana, Lungotevere.
"Go on! Go on!"
From Makalle°, on the far edge
of Gobi, where a white skull sang from the white sand
Not seeming weary, but sang and went on singing
"Alamein! Alamein!"°
Noi torneremo°
Noi TORNEREMO!
I said, I believe you
and that answer seemed to quiet him.

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But the other spirit came back with the refrain
"Were I less than a bull"
(A verse from the Eccerinus translated from the Latin)
but he did not finish the verse
Because all the air trembled and the shadows trembled as with a collapse
As thunder shaking the rain,
blazing phrase without sense shot through the rain,
A grating noise inside the submarine when the beam strikes it.
I heard the spirit as if in torture.
Guelf° slander, they have always used calumny,
The dung flow has got to Bologna as in the old war thru Romagna
Rape and fire as far as Bagnacavallo.
The buried dust, unlids itself
in the depths, and moves and breathes
and suffers in trying
to drive out the foreigners
and come to life again.
And I saw many in my time
And history shows them in a dirty series
Who betrayed city and province
Who sold Italy and the Empire
Rimini burned and Forlì destroyed.
Who will see Gemisto's° sepulchre
The arches down and the walls
of the divine Ixotta's resting place
and its symbolic designs burnt out.
& I cried out: "Who are you"
Against the fury of the whirlwind.
"Are you Sigismondo"?
But the presence did not listen
but in rage shouted:
"A Borgia° would be more likely than a Pacelli
to houseclean,

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Sixtus was son of a usurer
and all their gang
from Peter° the denier
and all followers of fattened usury
and they come groaning to you that Faranacci°
Has rough hands, because he has seen through the swindle.
He has one rough hand and has given the other
and for that is honoured by the heroes.
There are a lot of them: Tellera°, Maletti,
Miele, De Carolis and Lorenzini,
Guido Piacenza, Orsi & Predieri,
& Baldassarre, Borsarelli & Volpini
to name only the generals.
Clement° was the son of a banker
And Leo decimo son of a usurer."

I said: "who are you"?
"I am that Ezzolino who didn't believe
The world was made by a Jew,
and other outbreaks, that don't matter now,
& was betrayed by the man who betrayed your friend
i.e. Mussato who wrote that I
was the son of Orcus,°
and if you swallow such rot
any carrot can make a donkey of you,
the fair Adonis slain by a pig
to draw tears from the lovely Cyprian.°
If I made a toy of reason
I would say a bull for slaughter is worth a pigeon;
One taking pleasure in fables
Will say religion doesn't depend on the animal.
One single falsehood does more in a murderous world
Than all my outbreaks.
Spider° . . . spider!
Get that beast out of its hole.
If it isn'nt this:
The human beast loves its fetters?

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If ever the Emperor made that gift
Byzantium mothered the commotion,
He did it without form, illegaly,
Severing from himself & justice;
Caesar didn't split himself to fragments
Peter° was no rock before Augustus
had all the powers and functions.
The possessor only can be legal giver.
And the Florentines understood the Ghibelline° case.
Confusion of voices as from several transmitters, broken
phrases,
And many birds singing in counterpoint/In the summer
morning
and through their twitterings a suave tone:
"I was Placidia°, and slept beneath the gold."
"Woman's melancholy and gentleness,"
I began (to say), then
My skin tensed between my shoulder blades and my wrist
was seized in such an iron grip
That I could move neither wrist nor shoulder
And I saw a fist grasping my wrist but saw no forearm.
Holding me fast as a nail in the wall.
This sounds foolish to anyone who has not been thru it.
Then the voice that had been raging
said fiercely but not unfriendly, paternal rather
as one in midst of battle guiding an inexperienced youth
"The will is old but the hand is new,
Listen to me before I turn back into the night
Where the skull sings:
The regiments and the banners will return.

NOTES

These notes are to some extent based on the research of Professor Massimo Bacigalupo of the University of Genoa, who is recognized as the leading Pound scholar in Italy. He has

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published in English, on Pound, The Formed Trace: The Later Poetry of Ezra Pound, *Columbia University Press, 1980. His father, Dr. Giuseppe Bacigalupo was Pound's tennis partner and physician in Rapallo. Anyone wanting coverage of more of the references in the poem or more detail may consult Professor Bacigalupo's article "Ezra Pound's Cantos 72 and 73" in Volume 20, Number 1 of the journal* Paideuma, *302 Neville Hall, University of Maine, Orono, Maine, 04469.*

Geryon: In Greek mythology a three-headed monster killed by Hercules. *Inferno XVI.* Pound associates with fraud and usury. See Cantos 49 and 51.

Filippo Tomaso is F. T. Marinetti (1876–1944). Fascist supporter and the leader of the Italian Futurist movement, which influenced the Wyndham Lewis Vorticist group in London. For the EP/FTM relationship see Marinetti: *Selected Writings*, New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1972, pp. 18–19.

"h and c": Tomaso speaks in Tuscan dialect, reversing the *h* and *c* sounds.

"PRESENTE": "here."

Confucius, Mencius: Philosophers, some of whose work Pound translated. He taught himself Chinese. Confucianism was the core of his composite personal religion.

"The nostrils vomit . . .": Quotation from the fourteenth-century Latin play the *Ecerinis* by Albertino Mussato, the first modern tragedy in the style of Seneca. The play is about the life of the cruel Venetian tyrant Ezzolino da Romano. Pound knew of Ezzolino from Dante (*Inferno*, XII). He quotes Ezzolino as saying: "I am that Ezzolino who didn't believe/The world was made by a Jew." I cannot locate these lines in Dante; Pound may have made them up.

Dazzi: Manilio Torquato Dazzi: a librarian and friend of Pound's. He translated the *Ecerinis* into Italian in 1914.

Makalle: A fortress surrendered to the Ethiopians by the Italians in an early war. Its recapture was part of Mussolini's propaganda for the later war with Ethiopia in 1935.

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Alamein: The battle in North Africa in which Montgomery defeated Rommel, some of whose troops were Italian, in 1942.

"noi torneremo." We will return.

Guelfs and Ghibellines: Rival factions in the political struggles in Italy in the Renaissance. The Guelphs supported the pope and the Ghibellines the Holy Roman Emperor. Ezzolino was a Ghibelline.

Gemisto: Gemisthus Plethon (1355–1450). Greek humanist scholar whom Sigismondo Malatesta, Duke of Rimini, Pound's favorite condottiero, imported to his court at Rimini. Gemisthus is buried in the Tempio Malatestiana, the classical-style church which Sigismondo built as a monument to his family and a memorial to his mistress, the "divine" Ixotta degli Atti.

Borgia: Pope Alexander VI (1492–1503); **Pacelli:** Pope Pius XII (1939–1958); **Sixtus:** Pope Sixtus IV (1414–84).

St. Peter: Who denied Christ. **Matthew**, 26, 69–75.

Roberto Farinacci: (1892–1945) An ardent supporter of Mussolini. "**Leaf-eater**": very smart, catches on quickly.

Tellera, et al: Fascist army officers who supported Mussolini.

Clement: Pope Clement VII. A Medici pope. (1523–34). **Leo X**: another Medici pope. (1513–20).

Orcus: In Roman religion Orcus was Dis, god of the underworld, but Pound translates as "the Devil."

Cyprian: In mythology, Aphrodite was born on Cyprus.

Spider: Pound probably saw a spider on his table as he was writing.

Ghibelline: The Guelfs in Florence defeated the Ghibellines in 1250.

Placidia: Galla Placidia (388–450). Roman Empress of the West. Her mausoleum in Ravenna, famous for its magnificent mosaics, was one of Pound's "sacred places." **The gold**: the mosaic stars in the ceiling of the mausoleum. "in the gloom the gold/gathers the light against it." (Canto 11.)

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Ernest Hemingway



Titres Manqués

A Moveable Feast

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When asked in his 1958 Paris Review *interview with George Plimpton about choosing titles, Hemingway said, "I make a list of titles* after *I've finished the story or the book—sometimes as many as one hundred. Then I start eliminating them, sometimes all of them." Three years later he struggled with the list you see below—possible titles for a book about his early Paris days, a book which he said probably should not be published because of potential libel suits. Trying desperately to bring the manuscript to closure, he was working against great odds; to write memoirs a man must have his memory intact. In 1933 he had promised eventually to write "damned good memoirs" because he had "a rat-trap memory and the documents." Now electroshock therapy at the Mayo Clinic for severe paranoia and black depression had left him unable to remember the names of certain streets and minor characters. It was the morning of April 18, 1961 in Ketchum, Idaho, and Ernest Hemingway had less than three months remaining to his life.*

All his life he had made lists: lists of stories to write and books owned, lists of groceries and investments, inventories and title lists. Sometimes he got the title right the first time, as with Death in Afternoon. *Titles might come from a song ("Up in Michigan") or another author ("Fathers and Sons"). Sources he frequently checked were the King James Bible (*To Have and Have Not*) and collections of English verse and prose (*For Whom the Bell Tolls*). His title searches sometimes revealed his perspective on the story or book, but his final selection almost always rested on the title's poetics and its potential impact on the browsing customer.*

Sometimes he had to choose between two or more effective titles: for The Sun Also Rises *he rejected The Lost Generation. When he finished his first war novel, his rich list included: A World to See; Patriot's Progress; The Grand Tour; The World's Room; Disorder and Early Sorrow; Death Once Dead; The Sentimental Education; Love in Italy; Love in War; In*

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Another Country; A Late Wisdom; World Enough and Time; The Retreat from Italy; As Others Are. Some he crossed out; some he underlined, finally deciding on A Farewell to Arms.

Compared with earlier lists, the possible titles for his Paris memoirs seem repetitious and sad. Over and over again he reworked the same ideas: parts nobody knows, hunger, things as they were, true writing. "Three Mountains" referred both to the hills of Paris and Three Mountains Press which first published his In Our Time *(1924). Having turned the words through every possible arrangement, he fell back on* Proverbs*:*

> *As the bird by wandering, as the swallow by flying, so* the curse causeless *shall not come.*
>
> *[XXVI, 2.]*
>
> *It is better to dwell in* a corner of the housetop, *than with a brawling woman.*
>
> *[XXI, 9.]*
>
> To give subtilty to the simple, *to the young man knowledge and discretion.*
>
> *[I, 4.]*
>
> The hearing ear, and the seeing eye, *the Lord hath made even both of them.*
>
> *[XX, 12.]*

After writing "ng"—no good—beside several titles, he settled for The Eye and the Ear, the writer's gifts certainly but hardly poetic. At sixty-one Ernest Hemingway had lived his way into a corner, an old man in a dry month. His widow and his publisher would reject his choice and take the title from another of his unpublished manuscripts, calling his memoir A Moveable Feast.

The list that follows was attached to a letter addressed to Charles Scribner, but which was never sent. It was discovered by Mary Hemingway and sent to Scribners, where it recently turned up in a file. It is published here for the first time.

—Michael Reynolds

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The Part Nobody Knows ✓
To Love and Write Well
(The Paris Stories)
The Paris Nobody Knows.
How It Was Then
Our
People and Places
Places and People
To Write It Truly
(The Paris Stories)
To Write It True
The One True Hunger
Love is Hunger
~~Not~~ With
The Transplanting
~~The~~ Part Nobody Knows
(The Early Paris Stories)
The Parts Nobody Knows
How Different It Was
When You Were There
It is Different in The Ring
When We
Far Away
The Three Mountains and others
The Parts Nobody
To Love and Write Well
The Parts Nobody Knows

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GOOD NAILS ARE MADE OF IRON

TO BITE ON THE NAIL

THINGS IT

SOME THINGS AS THEY WERE

THE EARLY

THINGS AS THEY WERE

THE PEOPLE AND THE PLACES

TO TRY TO TELL IT TRUE

TO WRITE AND HAVE

A PART THEY DO NOT KNOW

WITH DUE RESPECT

MORE

THE D

SOME THINGS THEY DO NOT KNOW

SOME THINGS AS THEY WERE

~~TRUTH~~

YET

SOME ~~THE~~ PEOPLE AND THE PLACES

THINGS TO PUT DOWN

AT

I TELL YOU TRUE

TO TELL YOU TRUE

TO MAKE IT COME ALIVE

TO MAKE IT COME ALIVE
THE SKIES AND THE PLANTS
IT WAS DIFFERENT ~~THEN~~

TO MAKE IT COME

TO HAVE AND WRITE WELL

HOW IT BEGAN

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The Parts Nobody Knows

(including Early Parts
with The People AND The Pleiades)

The Parts Nobody Knows
(~~chapters~~ ~~Including~~ Early Parts
(chapters from the Early Days)

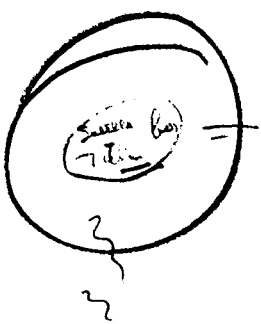
The Parts Nobody Knows
(CHAPTERS FROM The Early Days)

Some Parts Nobody Knows
Chapters From The early Days)

Notes
chap 17 could be developed as
is +
also chap 8 (18)
chap 9 (19)
perhaps

The Inestimables

To RETURN AND CONSIDER —
(The wonder and the People and The Pleiades)
NOT FOR ANY OUTWARD PART
The Western Wind
To search after a Master No
Not The outer courtless No
on a corner of the Housetop No
To give Subtility To the Simple
The eye AND The EAR (Consciousness)
(1-8)
The Eye and The Ear



(early Poems for
Newchen Kelly Come
Remember and
Consider
Called
revelation
keep near

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Robyn Selman

Exodus

> *Open your eyes, O beloved homeland, and behold*
> *your son, Sancho Panza, returning to you. If*
> *he does not come back very rich, he comes*
> *well flogged. Open your arms and receive also*
> *your other son, Don Quixote, who returns vanquished*
> *by the arm of another but a victor over himself*
> *and this, so I have been told, is the*
> *greatest victory that could be desired.*
>
> —Cervantes

I

And so I went forth, exhilarated
in uniform: worn-through jeans, muscle tees,
stripped of bras and ancestral history.
Since I had nothing real to take along,

I took along a fig-shaped stone,
a bag of gold buds, a resin-stained bong,
hash oil, in which papers were coated,
and two tabs of four-way blotter acid;

lactose-laced cocaine, cut to average,
a fifth of scotch, which was a parting gift,
a poncho, a guitar, feminist sheet music
and *Court and Spark*, which I'd tape-recorded.

With all this I'd find someone of my own.
An ill-equipped bride-to-be, I left home.

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II

The old man waves to me through iron bars
on his window, and I wave back at him.
Ten years back, at a spring semester end,
I went to Greece with three other women.

Joanne, whom I called Joey, my lover then,
was the only woman I knew who'd speak
the word proudly. She worked and was older
and didn't do drugs like I did, or bars.

She even looked what I thought was the part:
hair close-cropped, the top in a boyish mop.
We met in a club called The Other Side,
then fell in side by side later that night

on a futon with psychedelic sheets
that lay in an attic under beamed eaves.

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III

An ill-equipped bride-to-be, I left home.
The coke I'd flown with in my underwear
had melted into a yellowish loam.
Cheryl, who'd once caused a fire somewhere

drying her wet shirt in a microwave,
suggested that we lay the gluey high
on the warm radiator to try to save
what stash we could, and I agreed to try.

Moments later, the flakes began to fly
down to the floor like mocking stalactites.
My new roommate looked on, removed, dry-eyed.
She was a grad architecture student

with pre-fab plans for life in blueprints.
I befriended Mike with the good hash pipe.

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IV

We lay in an attic under beamed eaves,
then headed to New York from Washington.
My new lover, whom I didn't discover
for weeks was depressed and addicted,

for real, to caffeine and cigarettes,
piloted a Buick big as a hearse.
And when the speed she was sipping kicked in
the car did ninety. I waited for sirens.

We were rushing to a conference on women:
Millet, Morgan, Griffin, Rich, and Steinem.
I asked a woman who wasn't Millet
for her autograph. Mistaken, somewhat

humbler, I returned to Joey in the stands.
They called the next panel, "New Lesbians."

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V

I befriended Mike with the good hash pipe
and a constant yen for bourbon on ice.
I stayed straight. A consequence of having
no clue how I'd get that other kind of date.

I wore lavender tops, ankhs, stopped shaving,
carried code books face out though my arms ached,
hoped *she'd* recognize *Lesbian Nation*,
Millet's *Flying*, poems by Susan Griffin.

As I grew needy, the book chimney grew.
Finally, I turned back to what I knew:
the last of the coke, the dope, me and Mike,
moved in together with the good hash pipe.

He was pretty, but he wasn't a girl.
Next came Bob, but before him I had Phil.

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VI

They called the next panel, "New Lesbians."
I spent the day in the bleachers transfixed.
Joey had to walk off her nicotine fit.
We went to the ladies' (women's) room and kissed.

We were in love, we weren't saying we were.
I wasn't saying that the words I'd heard
were having a drug-like effect: *gay pride*
shot through me, some other blood mixed with mine.

The women I'd known didn't call themselves
lesbians, but winked across tennis courts
in short shorts, and gave slaps in locker rooms
that took the place (psychically) of bedrooms.

Was that sex or athletics? One panelist
asked, "Is sex as much fun with politics?"

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VII

Next came Bob, but before him I had Phil
who wore overalls with an unlatched bib
and an army sweater worn at the wrists.
He liked Schumann, Mao, Marx and Joplin's *Pearl*.

He rarely shaved, he washed infrequently
and spoke with a strong uncorrected lisp
which made him seem younger than twenty-six.
I didn't move in. He broke up with me.

Bob was a prize my mom couldn't resist:
six foot, an accountant-to-be, Jewish,
a hard worker, he'd make love then make coffee.
He took me home on the big holidays.

On weekends, with his parents, we saw plays.
We saw everything except that we were gay.

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VIII

"What did sex have to do with politics?"
Susan, my first, wrestled me to the floor
after her two-set win: six/one, six/four.
She was privileged, both pretty and rich.

Though I wasn't in love with her riches,
the idea that she passed was seductive.
We escaped the closeted coaches' judgment.
She was younger, but had already had

stacks of lovers: boys, girls, even a divorced
mother. Both she and her sister lost their
virginity to their older brother.
She said, "*It* had nothing to do with *it*."

I didn't know what *it* she meant, or
pretended I didn't, as I licked and kissed.

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IX

We saw everything except that we were gay.
Or, I saw everything except the way
around being gay. So I took to bars,
Donna Summer and Gloria Gaynor.

But I liked the stone butch I met better,
who by day flipped hamburgers and at night
was a chest-taped male impersonator.
Nothing ever happened with her, but I

paid the cover charge again and again
though I didn't speak to any new lesbians.
For cover, I'd take my closeted friends.
We danced shackled together like prisoners.

Eleanor, R., Nat, Virginia, or me—
One of us had to be the first to lead.

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X

I licked and kissed her in a bathroom stall
as a line of sisters wound down the hall,
Joey's eyes shut against the light green walls.
I drank the warm juices in, swallowing

sips of her like heroin, swallowing
her pride, still unable to summon
any of mine. Months after that kiss
she'd scold me in the Acropolis

for something I'd never heard of that she
loudly termed my *goddamambivalence*.
I snapped back that she was too serious
and imagined leaving her for good right there.

I didn't. I was too in love and scared—
thousands of years up in the chalky air.

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XI

One of us had to be the first to lead:
Eleanor R., Natalie B., Virginia
Woolf, Elizabeth R., Elizabeth B.,
Hedda and Alla Nazimova,

Debbie Reynolds, Gertrude Stein, Amelia,
Willa Cather, Cheryl, Whitney Houston,
Sylvia Beach, Billie Jean, Martina,
Jodie Foster, Marion Dickerman,

Lisa, Elizabeth Cady Stanton,
Lesley Gore and Susan B. Anthony,
Bessie, Babe Dietrichson, Val, Anne Murray,
Barbara Jordan and life-long companion,

Yourcenar, Colette, Marlene, H.D.—
the minds I admired, the strong-bodied.

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XII

Thousands of cheers filled the chalky air
in the hot Dalton School gymnasium.
Joey sipped cola and chewed Aspergum.
The speaker railed against the oppression

of gay/straight/black/white/Latino women.
They called a break. We hit the streets, like a gang, in
our "Sisterhood Is Powerful" buttons.
I was firmly a not-quite believer,

while Joey's button seemed to protect her.
At Sixtieth and Lex, I doubled over.
Outside things were different. I could see
that people could see. But that didn't seem

to bother Joey, whose hand lay on my knee,
a gesture I thought was only about me.

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XIII

The minds I admired, the strong-bodied,
the women who had started my fire,
all in the impregnable closet with me,
shackled together, caged by the same wire.

I was, at the time, just turning twenty
and lacked the mettle to try to unbend
thousands of years of history of women.
And so, like many women before me,

I let other women come out before me.
It wasn't that I had a wicked itch,
for I had long before gladly scratched *it*,
but I was still afraid of the language.

It was in the closet that the words took form
and with them I went forth in uniform.

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XIV

I thought the gesture was only about me.
We made our way through Greek islands by boat:
Joey in a chair; I, cross-legged and tortured
as Crane, reading his poems on a heap of rope.

I don't remember the other two women
except they were straight and Canadian.
That night after dinner and too much wine
I went to one (with blue eyes?) with the hope

of blurring the line between her kind and mine.
I found Joey walking with a cup of coffee.
I still hear the metronome of her steps,
that morning quiet as our empty bed.

The old man waves to me through iron bars
on his window and I wave back at him.

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XV

And so I went forth in uniform.
Through iron bars, the old man waved to me.
I left home, an ill-equipped bride-to-be
and lay in an attic under beamed eaves.

I befriended Mike with the good hash pipe.
They called the next panel, "New Lesbians."
Then came Bob, but before him was Phil.
What does sex have to do with politics?

We saw everything except that we were gay,
or pretended we didn't, as we licked and kissed.
One of us had to be the first to lead,
thousands of years up in the chalky air.

The minds I admired, the strong-bodied—
I thought the gesture was only about me.

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The Palace Thief

Ethan Canin

I tell this story not for my own honor, for there is little of that here, and not as a warning, for a man of my calling learns quickly that all warnings are in vain. Nor do I tell it in apology for St. Benedict's School, for St. Benedict's School needs no apologies. I tell it only to record certain foretellable incidents in the life of a well-known man, in the event that the brief candle of his days may sometime come under the scrutiny of another student of history. That is all. This is a story without surprises.

There are those, in fact, who say I should have known what would happen between St. Benedict's and me, and I suppose that they are right; but I loved that school. I gave service there to the minds of three generations of boys and always left upon them, if I was successful, the delicate imprint of their culture. I battled their indolence with discipline, their boorishness with philosophy and the arrogance of their stations with the history of great men before them. I taught the sons of nineteen senators. I taught a boy who, if not for the vengeful recriminations of the tabloids, would today have been President of the United States. That school was my life.

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This is why, I suppose, I accepted the invitation sent to me by Mr. Sedgewick Bell at the end of last year, although I should have known better. I suppose I should have recalled what kind of boy he had been at St. Benedict's forty-two years before instead of posting my response so promptly in the mail and beginning that evening to prepare my test. He, of course, was the son of Senator Sedgewick Hyram Bell, the West Virginia demagogue who kept horses at his residence in Washington, D.C. and had swung several southern states for Wendell Wilkie. The younger Sedgewick was a dull boy.

I first met him when I had been teaching history at St. Benedict's for only five years, in the autumn after his father had been delivered to office on the shoulders of southern patricians frightened by the unionization of steel and mines. Sedgewick appeared in my classroom in November of 1945, in a short-pants suit. It was midway through the fall term, that term in which I brought the boys forth from the philosophical idealism of the Greeks into the realm of commerce, military might and the law, which had given Julius Caesar his prerogative from Macedonia to Seville. My students, of course, were agitated. It is a sad distinction of that age group, the exuberance with which the boys abandon the moral endeavor of Plato and embrace the powerful, pragmatic hand of Augustus. The more sensitive ones had grown silent, and for several weeks our class discussions had been dominated by the martial instincts of the coarser boys. Of course I was sorry for this, but I was well aware of the import of what I taught at St. Benedict's. Our headmaster, Mr. Woodbridge, made us continually aware of the role our students would eventually play in the affairs of our country.

My classroom was in fact a tribute to the lofty ideals of man, which I hoped would inspire my boys, and at the same time to the fleeting nature of human accomplishment, which I hoped would temper their ambition with humility. It was a dual tactic, with which Mr. Woodbridge heartily agreed. Above the doorframe hung a tablet, made as a term project by Henry L. Stimson when he was a boy here, that I hoped

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would teach my students of the irony that history bestows upon ambition. In clay relief, it said:

I am Shutruk-Nahhunte, King of Anshan and Susa,
sovereign of the land of Elam.
By the command of Inshushinak,
I destroyed Sippar, took the stele of Naram-Sin,
and brought it back to Elam,
where I erected it as an offering to my god,
Inshushinak.

—Shutruk-Nahhunte, 1158 B.C.

I always noted this tablet to the boys on their first day in my classroom, partly to inform them of their predecessors at St. Benedict's, and partly to remind them of the great ambition and conquest that had been utterly forgotten centuries before they were born. Afterwards I had one of them recite, from the wall where it hung above my desk, Shelley's *Ozymandias*. It is critical for any man of import to understand his own insignificance before the sands of time, and this is what my classroom always showed my boys.

As young Sedgewick Bell stood in the doorway of that classroom his first day at St. Benedict's, however, it was apparent that such efforts would be lost on him. I could see that not only was he a dullard but a roustabout. The boys happened to be wearing the togas they had made from sheets and safety pins the day before, spreading their knees like magistrates in the wooden desk chairs, and I was taking them through the recitation of the emperors when Mr. Woodbridge entered alongside the stout, red-faced Sedgewick and introduced him to the class. I had taught for five years, as I have said, and I knew the frightened, desperate bravura of a new boy. Sedgewick Bell did not wear this look.

Rather, he wore one of disdain. The boys, fifteen in all, were instantly intimidated into sensing the foolishness of their improvised cloaks, and one of them, Clay Walter, the leader

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of the dullards—though far from a dullard himself—said, to mild laughter, "Where's your toga, kid?"

Sedgewick Bell answered, "Your mother must be wearing your pants today."

It took me a moment to regain the attention of the class, and when Sedgewick was seated I had him go to the board and copy out the Emperors. Of course, he did not know the names of any of them, and my boys had to call them out, repeatedly correcting his spelling as he wrote out in a sloppy hand:

Augustus
Tiberius
Caligula
Claudius
Nero
Galba
Otho

all the while lifting and resettling the legs of his short pants in mockery of what his new classmates were wearing. "Young man," I said, "this is a serious class, and I expect that you will take it seriously."

"If it's such a serious class, then why're they all wearing dresses?" he responded, again to laughter, although by now Clay Walter had loosened the rope belt at his waist, and the boys around him were shifting uncomfortably in their togas.

From that first day, Sedgewick Bell became a boor and a bully, a damper to the illumination of the eager minds of my boys and a purveyor of the mean-spirited humor that is like kerosene in a school such as ours. What I asked of my boys that semester was simple, that they learn the facts I presented to them in an "Outline of Ancient Roman History," which I had whittled, through my years of teaching, to exactly four closely typed pages; yet Sedgewick Bell was unwilling to do so. He was a poor student, and on his first exam could not even tell me who it was that Mark Antony and Octavian had routed at Philippi, nor who Octavian later became, although

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an average wood beetle in the floor of my classroom could have done so with ease.

Furthermore, as soon as he arrived he began a stream of capers using spitballs, wads of gum and thumbtacks. Of course it was common for a new boy to engage his comrades thusly, but Sedgewick Bell then began to add the dangerous element of natural leadership—which was based on the physical strength of his features—to his otherwise puerile antics. He organized the boys. At exactly fifteen minutes to the hour, they would all drop their pencils at once or cough or slap closed their books so that writing at the blackboard my hands would jump in the air.

At a boys' school, of course, punishment is a cultivated art. Whenever one of these antics occurred I simply made a point of calling on Sedgewick Bell to answer a question. General laughter usually followed his stabs at answers, and although Sedgewick himself usually laughed along with everyone else, it did not require a great deal of insight to know that the tactic would work. The organized events began to occur less frequently.

In retrospect, however, perhaps my strategy was a mistake, for to convince a boy of his own stupidity is to shoot a poisonous arrow indeed. Perhaps Sedgewick Bell's life would have turned out more nobly if I had understood his motivations right away and treated him differently at the start. But such are the pointless speculations of a teacher. What was irrefutably true was that he was performing poorly on his quizzes, even if his behavior had improved somewhat, and therefore I called him to my office.

In those days, I lived in small quarters off the rear of the main hall, in what had been a slave's room when the grounds of St. Benedict's had been the estate of the philanthropist and horse breeder, Cyrus Beck. Having been at school as long as I had, I no longer lived in the first-form dormitory that stood behind my room, but supervised it, so that I saw most of the boys only in matters of urgency. They came sheepishly before me.

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With my bed folded into the wall, the room became my office, and shortly after supper one day that winter of his first-form year, Sedgewick Bell knocked and entered. Immediately he began to inspect the premises, casting his eyes, which had the patrician set of his father's, from the desk, to the shelves, to the bed folded into the wall.

"Sit down, boy."

"You're not married, are you, sir?"

"No, Sedgewick, I am not. However, we are here to talk about *you*."

"That's why you like puttin' us in togas, right?"

I had, frankly, never encountered a boy like him before, who at the age of thirteen would affront his schoolmaster without other boys in audience. He gazed at me flatly, his chin in his hand.

"Young man," I said, sensing his motivations with sudden clarity, "We are concerned about your performance here, and I have made an appointment to see your father."

In fact, I had made no appointment with Senator Bell, but at that moment I understood that I would have to. "What would you like me to tell the senator?" I said.

His gaze faltered. "I'm going to try harder, Sir, from now on."

"Good, Sedgewick. Good."

Indeed, that week the boys reenacted the pivotal scenes from *Julius Caesar*, and Sedgewick read his lines quite passably and contributed little that I could see to the occasional fits of giggles that circulated among the slower boys. The next week, I gave a quiz on the Triumvirate of Crassus, Pompey and Caesar, and he passed for the first time yet, with a C+.

Nonetheless, I had told him that I was going to speak with his father, and this is what I was determined to do. At the time, Senator Sedgewick Hyram Bell was appearing regularly in the newspapers and on the radio in his stand against Truman's plan for national health insurance, and I was loathe to call upon such a well-known man concerning the behavior of his son. On the radio his voice was a tobacco drawl that had

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won him populist appeal throughout West Virginia, although his policies alone would certainly not have done so. I was at the time in my late twenties, and although I was armed with scruples and an education, my hands trembled as I dialed his office. To my surprise, I was put through, and the senator, in the drawl I recognized instantly, agreed to meet me one afternoon the following week. The man already enjoyed national stature, of course, and although any other father would no doubt have made the journey to St. Benedict's himself, I admit that the prospect of seeing the man in his own office intrigued me. Thus I journeyed to the capital.

St. Benedict's lies in the bucolic, equine expanse of rural Virginia, nearer in spirit to the Carolinas than to Maryland, although the drive to Washington requires little more than an hour. The bus followed the misty, serpentine course of the Passamic, then entered the marshlands that are now the false-brick suburbs of Washington and at last left me downtown in the capital, where I proceeded the rest of the way on foot. I arrived at the Senate office building as the sun moved low against the bare-limbed cherries among the grounds. I was frightened but determined, and I reminded myself that Sedgewick Hyram Bell was a senator but also a father, and I was here on business that concerned his son. The office was as grand as a duke's.

I had not waited long in the anteroom when the man himself appeared, feisty as a game hen, bursting through a side door and clapping me on the shoulder as he urged me before him into his office. Of course I was a novice then in the world of politics and had not yet realized that such men are, above all, likable. He put me in a leather seat, offered a cigar, which I refused, and then with real or contrived wonder—perhaps he did something like this with all of his visitors—he proceeded to show me an antique sidearm that had been sent to him that morning by a constituent and that had once belonged, he said, to the coachman of Robert E. Lee. "You're a history buff," he said, "right?"

"Yes, sir."

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"Then take it. It's yours."

"No, sir. I couldn't."

"Take the damn thing."

"All right, I will."

"Now, what brings you to this dreary little office?"

"Your son, sir."

"What the devil has he done now?"

"Very little, sir. We're concerned that he isn't learning the material."

"What material is that?"

"We're studying the Romans now, sir. We've left the Republic and entered the Empire."

"Ah," he said. "Be careful with that, by the way. It still fires."

"Your son seems not to be paying attention, sir."

He again offered me the box of cigars across the desk and then bit off the end of his own. "Tell me," he said, puffing the thing until it flamed suddenly, "What's the good of what you're teaching them boys?"

This was a question for which I was well prepared, fortunately, having recently written a short piece in *The St. Benedict's Crier* answering the same challenge put forth there by an anonymous boy. "When they read of the reign of Augustus Caesar," I said without hesitation, "when they learn that his rule was bolstered by commerce, a postal system and the arts, by the reformation of the senate and by the righting of an inequitable system of taxation, when they see the effect of scientific progress through the census and the enviable network of Roman roads, how these advances led mankind away from the brutish rivalries of potentates into the two centuries of *pax romana*, then they understand the importance of character and high ideals."

He puffed at his cigar. "Now, that's a horse who can talk." he said. "And you're telling me my son Sedgewick has his head in the clouds."

"It's my job, sir, to mold your son's character."

He thought for a moment, idly fingering a match. Then

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his look turned stern. "I'm sorry, young man," he said slowly, "but you will not mold him. I will mold him. You will merely teach him."

That was the end of my interview, and I was politely shown the door. I was bewildered, naturally, and found myself in the elevator before I could even take account of what had happened. Senator Bell was quite likable, as I have noted, but he had without doubt cut me, and as I made my way back to the bus station, the gun stowed deep in my briefcase, I considered what it must have been like to have been raised under such a tyrant. My heart warmed somewhat toward young Sedgewick.

Back at St. Benedict's, furthermore, I saw that my words had evidently had some effect on the boy, for in the weeks that followed he continued on his struggling, uphill course. He passed two more quizzes, receiving an A – on one of them. For his midterm project he produced an adequate papier-mâché rendering of Hadrian's gate, and in class he was less disruptive to the group of do-nothings among whom he sat, if indeed he was not in fact attentive.

Such, of course, are the honeyed morsels of a teacher's existence, those students who come, under one's own direction, from darkness into the light, and I admit that I might have taken a special interest that term in Sedgewick Bell. If I gave him the benefit of the doubt on his quizzes when he straddled two grades, if I began to call on him in class only for those questions I had reason to believe he could answer, then I was merely trying to encourage the nascent curiosity of a boy who, to all appearances, was struggling gamely from beneath the formidable umbra of his father.

The fall term was by then drawing to a close, and the boys had begun the frenzy of preliminary quizzes for the annual Mister Julius Caesar competition. Here again, I suppose I was in my own way rooting for Sedgewick. Mister Julius Caesar is a St. Benedict's tradition, held in reverence among the boys, the kind of mythic ritual that is the currency of a school like ours. It is a contest, held in two phases. The first is a narrowing

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maneuver, by means of a dozen written quizzes, from which three boys from the first form emerge victorious. The second is a public tournament, in which these three take the stage before the assembled student body and answer questions about ancient Rome until one alone emerges triumphant, as had Caesar himself from among Crassus and Pompey. Parents and graduates fill out the audience. Out front of Mr. Woodbridge's office, a plaque attests to the Misters Julius Caesar of the previous half-century—a list that begins with John F. Dulles in 1901—and although the ritual might seem quaint to those who have not attended St. Benedict's, I can only say that, in a school like ours, one cannot overstate the importance of a public joust.

That year I had three obvious contenders: Clay Walter, who, as I intimated, was a somewhat gifted boy; Martin Blythe, a studious type; and Deepak Mehta, the son of a Bombay mathematician, who was dreadfully quiet but clearly my best student. It was Deepak, in fact, who on his own and entirely separate from the class had studied the disparate peoples, from the Carthaginians to the Egyptians, whom the Romans had conquered.

By the end of the narrowing quizzes, however, a surprising configuration had emerged: Sedgewick Bell had pulled himself to within a few points of third place in my class. This was when I made my first mistake. Although I should certainly have known better, I was impressed enough by his efforts that I broke one of the cardinal rules of teaching: I gave him an A on a quiz on which he had earned only a B, and in so doing, I leap-frogged him over Martin Blythe. On March 15th, when the three finalists took their seats on stage in front of the assembled population of the school, Sedgewick Bell was among them, and his father was among the audience.

The three boys had donned their togas for the event and were arranged around the dais on which a pewter platter held the green, silk garland that, at the end of the morning, I would place upon the brow of the winner. As the interrogator, I stood front row, center, next to Mr. Woodbridge.

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"Which language was spoken by the Sabines?"

"Oscan," answered Clay Walter without hesitation.

"Who composed the Second Triumvirate?"

"Mark Antony, Octavian and Marcus Aemilius Lepidus, Sir," answered Deepak Mehta.

"Who was routed at Phillipi?"

Sedgewick Bell's eyes showed no recognition. He lowered his head in his hands as though pushing himself to the limit of his intellect, and in the front row my heart dropped. Several boys in the audience began to twitter. Sedgewick's own leg began to shake inside his toga. When he looked up again I felt that it was I who had put him in this untenable position, I who had brought a tender bud too soon into the heat, and I wondered if he would ever forgive me; but then, without warning, he smiled slightly, folded his hands and said, "Brutus and Cassius."

"Good," I said, instinctively. Then I gathered my poise. "Who deposed Romulus Augustulus, the last Emperor of the Western Empire?"

"Odoacer," Clay Walter answered, then added, "in 476 A.D."

"Who introduced the professional army to Rome?"

"Gaius Marius, Sir," answered Deepak Mehta, then himself added, "in 104 B.C."

When I asked Sedgewick his next question—Who was the leading Carthaginian General of the Second Punic War?—I felt some unease because the boys in the audience seemed to sense that I was favoring him with an easier examination. Nonetheless, his head sank into his hands, and he appeared once again to be straining the limits of his memory before he looked up and produced the obvious answer, "Hannibal."

I was delighted. Not only was he proving my gamble worthwhile but he was showing the twittering boys in the audience that, under fire, discipline produces accurate thought. By now they had quieted, and I had the sudden, heartening premonition that Sedgewick Bell was going to surprise us after all, that his tortoiselike deliberation would win him, by morning's end, the garland of laurel.

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The next several rounds of questions proceeded much in the same manner as had the previous two. Deepak Mehta and Clay Walter answered without hesitation, and Sedgewick Bell did so only after a tedious and deliberate period of thought. What I realized, in fact, was that his style made for excellent theater. The parents, I could see, were impressed, and Mr. Woodbridge next to me, no doubt thinking about the next annual drive, was smiling broadly.

After a second-form boy had brought a glass of water to each of the contestants, I moved on to the next level of questions. These had been chosen for their difficulty, and on the first round Clay Walter fell out, not knowing the names of Augustus's children. He left the stage and moved back among his dim-witted pals in the audience. By the rule of clockwise progression the same question then went to Deepak Mehta, who answered it correctly, followed by the next one, which concerned King Jugurtha of Numidia. Then, because I had no choice, I had to ask Sedgewick Bell something difficult: "Which General had the support of the aristocrats in the civil war of 88 B.C.?"

To the side, I could see several parents pursing their lips and furrowing their brows, but Sedgewick Bell appeared to not even notice the greater difficulty of the query. Again he dropped his head into his hands. By now the audience expected his period of deliberation, and they sat quietly. One could hear the hum of the ventilation system and the dripping of the icicles outside. Sedgewick Bell cast his eyes downward, and it was at this moment that I realized he was cheating.

I had come to this job straight from my degree at Carleton College, at the age of twenty-one, having missed enlistment due to myopia, and carrying with me the hope that I could give to my boys the more important vision that my classical studies had given to me. I knew that they responded best to challenge. I knew that a teacher who coddled them at that age would only hold them back, would keep them in the bosoms of their mothers so long that they would remain weak-minded through preparatory school and inevitably then

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through college. The best of my own teachers had been tyrants. I well remembered this. Yet at that moment I felt an inexplicable pity for the boy. Was it simply the humiliation we had both suffered at the hands of his father? I peered through my glasses at the stage and knew at once that he had attached "The Outline of Ancient Roman History" to the inside of his toga.

I don't know how long I stood there, between the school assembled behind me and the two boys seated in front, but after a period of internal deliberation, during which time I could hear the rising murmurs of the audience, I decided that in the long run it was best for Sedgewick Bell to be caught. Oh, how the battle is lost for want of a horse! I leaned to Mr. Woodbridge next to me and whispered, "I believe Sedgewick Bell is cheating."

"Ignore it," he whispered back.

"What?"

Of course, I have great respect for what Mr. Woodbridge did for St. Benedict's in the years he was among us. A headmaster's world is a far more complex one than a teacher's, and it is historically inopportune to blame a life gone afoul on a single incident in childhood. However, I myself would have stood up for our principles had Mr. Woodbridge not at that point said, "Ignore it, Hundert, or look for another job."

Naturally, my headmaster's words startled me for a moment; but being familiar with the necessities of a boys' school, and having recently entertained my first thoughts about one day becoming a headmaster myself, I simply nodded when Sedgewick Bell produced the correct answer, Lucius Cornelius Sulla. Then I went on to the next question, which concerned Scipio Africanus Major. Deepak Mehta answered it correctly, and I turned once again to Sedgewick Bell.

In a position of moral leadership, of course, compromise begets only more compromise, and although I know this now from my own experience, at the time I did so only from my study of history. Perhaps that is why I again found an untenable compassion muddying my thoughts. What kind of desper-

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ation would lead a boy to cheat on a public stage? His father and mother were well back in the crowded theater, but when I glanced behind me my eye went instantly to them, as though they were indeed my own parents, out from Kansas City. "Who were the first emperors to reign over the divided Empire?" I asked Sedgewick Bell.

When one knows the magician's trick, the only wonder is in its obviousness, and as Sedgewick Bell lowered his head this time I clearly saw the nervous flutter of his gaze directed into the toga. Indeed I imagined him scanning the entire "Outline," from Augustus to Jovian, pasted inside the twill, before coming to the answer, which, pretending to ponder, he then spoke aloud: "Valentinian the First, and Valens."

Suddenly Senator Bell called out, "That's my boy!"

The crowd thundered, and I had the sudden, indefensible urge to steer the contest in young Sedgewick Bell's direction. In a few moments, however, from within the subsiding din, I heard the thin, accented voice of a woman speaking Deepak Mehta's name; and it was the presence of his mother, I suppose, that finally brought me to my senses. Deepak answered the next question correctly, about Diocletian, and then I turned to Sedgewick Bell and asked him, "Who was Hamilcar Barca?"

Of course, it was only Deepak who knew that this answer was not on the "Outline," because Hamilcar Barca was a Phoenician general eventually routed by the Romans; it was only Deepak, as I have noted, who had bothered to study the conquered peoples. He briefly widened his eyes at me—in recognition? in gratitude? in disapproval?—while, beside him, Sedgewick Bell again lowered his head into his hands. After a long pause, Sedgewick asked me to repeat the question.

I did so, and after another, long pause, he scratched his head. Finally, he said, "Jeez."

The boys in the audience laughed, but I turned and silenced them. Then I put the same question to Deepak Mehta, who answered it correctly, of course, and then received a round of applause that was polite but not sustained.

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It was only as I mounted the stage to present Deepak with the garland of laurel, however, that I glanced at Mr. Woodbridge and realized that he too had wanted me to steer the contest toward Sedgewick Bell. At the same moment, I saw Senator Bell making his way toward the rear door of the hall. Young Sedgewick stood limply to the side of me, and I believe I had my first inkling then of the mighty forces that would twist the life of that boy. I could only imagine his thoughts as he stood there on stage while his mother, struggling to catch up with the senator, vanished through the fire door at the back. The next morning, our calligraphers would add Deepak Mehta's name to the plaque outside Mr. Woodbridge's office, and young Sedgewick Bell would begin his lifelong pursuit of missed glory.

Yet perhaps because of the disappointment I could see in Mr. Woodbridge's eyes, it somehow seemed that I was the one who had failed the boy, and as soon as the auditorium was empty I left for his room. There I found him seated on the bed, still in his toga, gazing out the small window to the lacrosse fields. I could see the sheets of my "Outline"pressed against the inside of his garment.

"Well, young man," I said, knocking on the doorframe, "that certainly was an interesting performance."

He turned around from the window and looked at me coldly. What he did next I have thought about many times over the years, the labyrinthine wiliness of it, and I can only attribute the precociousness of his maneuvering to the bitter education he must have received at home. As I stood before him in the doorway, Sedgewick Bell reached inside his cloak and one at a time lifted out the pages of my "Outline."

I stepped inside and closed the door. Every teacher knows a score of boys who do their best to be expelled; this is a cliché in a school like ours, but as soon as I closed the door to his room and he acknowledged the act with a feline smile, I knew that this was not Sedgewick Bell's intention at all.

"I knew you saw," he said.

"Yes, you are correct."

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"How come you didn't say anything, eh, Mr. Hundert?"

"It's a complicated matter, Sedgewick."

"It's because my pop was there."

"It had nothing to do with your father."

"Sure, Mr. Hundert."

Frankly, I was at my wits' end, first from what Mr. Woodbridge had said to me in the theater and now from the audacity of the boy's accusation. I myself went to the window then and let my eyes wander over the campus so that they would not have to engage the dark, accusatory gaze of Sedgewick Bell. What transpires in an act of omission like the one I had committed? I do not blame Mr. Woodbridge, of course, any more than a soldier can blame his captain. What had happened was that instead of enforcing my own code of morals, I had allowed Sedgewick Bell to sweep me summarily into his. I did not know at the time what an act of corruption I had committed, although what is especially chilling to me is that I believe that Sedgewick Bell, even at the age of thirteen, did.

He knew also, of course, that I would not pursue the matter, although I spent the ensuing several days contemplating a disciplinary action. Each time I summoned my resolve to submit the boy's name to the honor committee, however, my conviction waned, for at these times I seemed to myself to be nothing more than one criminal turning in another. I fought this battle constantly, in my simple rooms, at the long, chipped table I governed in the dining hall and at the dusty chalkboard before my classes. I felt like an exhausted swimmer trying to climb a slippery wall out of the sea.

Furthermore, I was alone in my predicament, for among a boarding school faculty, which is as perilous as a medieval court, one does not publicly discuss a boy's misdeeds. This is true even if the boy is not the son of a senator. In fact, the only teacher I decided to trust with my situation was Charles Ellerby, our new Latin instructor and a kindred lover of antiquity. I had liked Charles Ellerby as soon as we had met because he was a moralist of no uncertain terms, and indeed when I confided in him about Sedgewick Bell's behavior and Mr.

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Woodbridge's response, he suggested that it was my duty to circumvent our headmaster and speak to Senator Bell again.

Less than a week after I had begun to marshall my resolve, however, the senator himself called *me*. He proffered a few moments of small talk, asked after the gun he had given me, and then said gruffly, "Young man, my son tells me the Hannibal Barca question was not on the list he had to know."

Now, indeed, I was shocked. Even from young Sedgewick Bell I had not expected this audacity. "How deeply the viper is a viper," I said, before I could help myself.

"Excuse me?"

"The Phoenician General was *Hamilcar* Barca, Sir, not Hannibal."

The Senator paused. "My son tells me you asked him a question that was not on the list, which the Oriental fellow knew the answer to in advance. He feels you've been unfair, is all."

"It's a complex situation, sir," I said. I marshalled my will again by imagining what Charles Ellerby would do in the situation. However, no sooner had I resolved to confront the senator than it became perfectly clear to me that I lacked the character to do so. I believe this had long been clear to Sedgewick Bell.

"I'm sure it is complex," Senator Bell said, "But I assure you, there are situations more complex. Now, I'm not asking you to correct anything this time, you understand. My son has told me a great deal about you, Mr. Hundert. If I were you, I'd remember that."

"Yes, sir," I said, although by then I realized he had hung up.

And thus young Sedgewick Bell and I began an uneasy compact that lasted out his days at St. Benedict's. He was a dismal student from that day forward, scratching at the very bottom of a class that was itself a far cry from the glorious, yesteryear classes of John Dulles and Henry Stimson. His quizzes were abominations, and his essays were pathetic digestions of those of the boys sitting next to him. He chatted amiably

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in study hall, smoked cigarettes in the third-form linen room, and when called upon in class could be counted on to blink and stutter as if called upon from sleep.

But perhaps the glory days of St. Benedict's had already begun their wane, for even then, well before the large problems that beset us, no action was taken against the boy. He became a symbol for Charles Ellerby and me, evidence of the first tendrils of moral rot that seemed to be twining among the posts and timbers of our school. Although we told nobody else of his secret, the boy's dim-witted recalcitrance soon succeeded in alienating all but the other students. His second- and third-form years passed as ingloriously as his first, and by the outset of his last with us he had grown to mythic infamy among the faculty members who had known the school in its days of glory.

He had grown physically larger as well, and now when I chanced upon him on the campus he held his ground against my disapproving stare with a dark one of his own. To complicate matters, he had cultivated, despite his boorish character, an impressive popularity among his schoolmates, and it was only through the subtle intervention of several of his teachers that he had failed on two occasions to win the presidency of the student body. His stride had become a strut. His favor among the others boys, of course, had its origin in the strength of his physical features, in the precocious evil of his manner, and in the bellowing timbre of his voice, but unfortunately such crudities are all the more impressive to a group of boys living out of sight of their parents.

That is not to say that the faculty of St. Benedict's had given up hope for Sedgewick Bell. Indeed, a teacher's career is punctuated with difficult students like him, and despite the odds one could not help but hope for his eventual rehabilitation. As did all the other teachers, I held out promise for Sedgewick Bell. In his fits of depravity and intellectual feebleness I continued to look for glimpses of discipline and progress.

By his fourth-form year, however, when I had become dean of seniors, it was clear that Sedgewick Bell would not change, at

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least not while he was at St. Benedict's. Even with his powerful station, he had not even managed to gain admission to the state university, and it was with a sense of failure then, finally, that I handed him his diploma in the spring of 1949, on an erected stage at the north end of the great field, on which he came forward, met my disapproving gaze with his own flat one and trundled off to sit among his friends.

It was with some surprise then that I learned in *The Richmond Gazette*, thirty-seven years later, of Sedgewick Bell's ascension to the chairmanship of EastAmerica Steel, at that time the second largest corporation in America. I chanced upon the news one morning in the winter of 1987, the year of my great problems with St. Benedict's, while reading the newspaper in the east-lighted breakfast room of the Assistant Headmaster's House. St. Benedict's, as everyone knows, had fallen upon difficult times by then, and an unseemly aspect of my job was that I had to maintain a lookout for possible donors to the school. Forthwith, I sent a letter to Sedgewick Bell.

Apart from the five or six years in which a classmate had written to *The Benedictine* of his whereabouts, I had heard almost nothing about the boy since the year of his graduation. This was unusual, of course, as St. Benedict's makes a point of keeping abreast of its graduates, and I can only assume that his absence in the yearly alumni notes was due to an act of will on his own part. One wonders how much of the boy remained in the man. It is indeed a rare vantage that a St. Benedict's teacher holds, to have known our statesmen, our policy-makers, and our captains of industry in their days of short pants and classroom pranks, and I admit that it was with some nostalgia that I composed the letter.

Since his graduation, of course, my career had proceeded with the steady ascension that the great schools have always afforded their dedicated teachers. Ten years after Sedgewick Bell's departure, I had moved from dean of seniors to dean

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of the upper school, and after a decade there to dean of academics, a post that some would consider a demotion but that I seized with reverence because it afforded me the chance to make inroads on the minds of a generation. At the time, of course, the country was in the throes of a violent, peristaltic rejection of tradition, and I felt a particular urgency to my mission of staying a course that had led a century of boys through the rise and fall of ancient civilizations.

In those days, our meetings of the faculty and trustees were rancorous affairs in which great pressure was exerted in attempts to alter the time-tested curriculum of the school. Planning a course was like going into battle, and hiring a new teacher was like crowning a king. Whenever one of our ranks retired or left for another school, the different factions fought tooth-and-nail to influence the appointment. I was the dean of academics, as I have noted, and these skirmishes naturally waged around my foxhole. For the lesser appointments I often feinted to gather leverage for the greater ones, whose campaigns I fought with abandon.

At one point especially, midway through that decade in which our country had lost its way, St. Benedict's arrived at a crossroads. The chair of humanities had retired, and a pitched battle over his replacement developed between Charles Ellerby and a candidate from outside. A meeting ensued in which my friend and this other man spoke to the assembled faculty and trustees, and though I will not go into detail, I will say that the outside candidate felt that, because of the advances in our society, history had become little more than a relic.

Oh, what dim-sighted times those were! The two camps sat on opposite sides of the chapel as speakers took the podium one after another to wage war. The controversy quickly became a forum concerning the relevance of the past. Teacher after teacher debated the import of what we in history had taught for generations, and assertion after assertion was met with boos and applause. Tempers blazed. One powerful member of the board had come to the meeting in blue jeans and a tie-dyed shirt, and after we had been arguing for several hours

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and all of us were exhausted he took the podium and challenged me personally, right then and there, to debate with him the merits of Roman history.

He was not an ineloquent man, and he chose to speak his plea first, so that by the time he had finished his attack against antiquity I sensed that my battle on behalf of Charles Ellerby, and of history itself, was near to lost. My heart was gravely burdened, for if we could not win our point here among teachers, then among whom indeed could we win it? The room was silent, and on the other side of the chapel our opponents were gathering nearer to one another in the pews.

When I rose to defend my calling, however, I also sensed that victory was not beyond my reach. I am not a particularly eloquent orator, but as I took my place at the chancel rail in the amber glow of the small rose window above us, I was braced by the sudden conviction that the great men of history had sent me forward to preserve their deeds. Charles Ellerby looked up at me biting his lip, and suddenly I remembered the answer I had written long ago in *The Crier*. Its words flowed as though unbidden from my tongue, and when I had finished I knew that we had won. It was my proudest moment at St. Benedict's.

Although the resultant split among the faculty was an egregious one, Charles Ellerby secured the appointment, and together we were able to do what I had always dreamed of doing: we redoubled our commitment to classical education. In times of upheaval, of course, adherence to tradition is all the more important, and perhaps this was why St. Benedict's was brought intact through that decade and the one that followed. Our fortunes lifted and dipped with the gentle rhythm to which I had long ago grown accustomed. Our boys won sporting events and prizes, endured minor scandals and occasional tragedies and then passed on to good colleges. Our endowment rose when the government was in the hands of Republicans, as did the caliber of our boys when it was in the hands of Democrats. Senator Bell declined from prominence, and within a few years I read that he had passed away. In time,

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I was made assistant headmaster. Indeed it was not until a few years ago that anything out of the ordinary happened at all, for it was then, in the late 1980s, that some ill-advised investments were made and our endowment suffered a decline.

Mr. Woodbridge had by this time reached the age of seventy-four, and although he was a vigorous man, one Sunday morning in May while the school waited for him in Chapel he died open-eyed in his bed. Immediately there occurred a Byzantine struggle for succession. There is nothing wrong with admitting that by then I myself coveted the job of Headmaster, for one does not remain four decades at a school without becoming deeply attached to its fate; but Mr. Woodbridge's death had come suddenly and I had not yet begun the preparations for my bid. I was, of course, no longer a young man. I suppose, in fact, that I lost my advantage here by underestimating my opponents who indeed were younger, as Caesar had done with Brutus and Cassius.

I should not have been surprised, then, when after several days of maneuvering, my principal rival turned out to be Charles Ellerby. For several years, I discovered, he had been conducting his own, internecine campaign for the position, and although I had always counted him as my ally and my friend, in the first meeting of the board he rose and spoke accusations against me. He said that I was too old, that I had failed to change with the times, that my method of pedagogy might have been relevant forty years ago but that it was not today. He stood and said that a headmaster needed vigor and that I did not have it. Although I watched him the entire time he spoke, he did not once look back at me.

I was wounded, of course, both professionally and in the hidden part of my heart in which I had always counted Charles Ellerby as a companion in my lifelong search for the magnificence of the past. When several of the older teachers booed him, I felt cheered. At this point I saw that I was not alone in my bid, merely behind, and so I left the meeting without coming to my own defense. Evening had come, and I walked to the dining commons in the company of allies.

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How it is, when fighting for one's life, to eat among children! As the boys in their school blazers passed around the platters of fishsticks and the bowls of sliced bread, my heart was pierced with their guileless grace. How soon, I wondered, would they see the truth of the world? How long before they would understand that it was not dates and names that I had always meant to teach them? Not one of them seemed to notice what had descended like thunderheads above their faculty. Not one of them seemed unable to eat.

After dinner, I returned to the Assistant Headmaster's House in order to plot my course and confer with those I still considered allies, but before I could begin my preparations there was a knock at the door. Charles Ellerby stood there, red in the cheeks. "May I ask you some questions?" he said breathlessly.

"It is I who ought to ask them of you," was my answer.

He came in without being asked and took a seat at my table. "You've never been married, am I correct, Hundert?"

"Look, Ellerby, I've been at St. Benedict's since you were in prep school yourself."

"Yes, yes," he said, in an exaggeration of boredom. Of course, he knew as well as I that I had never married, nor started a family, because history itself had always been enough for me. He rubbed his head and appeared to be thinking. To this day, I wonder how he knew about what he said next, unless Sedgewick Bell had somehow told him the story of my visit to the senator. "Look," he said. "There's a rumor you keep a pistol in your desk drawer."

"Hogwash."

"Will you open it for me," he said, pointing there.

"No, I will not. I have been a dean here for twenty years."

"Are you telling me there is no pistol in this house?"

He then attempted to stare me down. He was a man with little character, however, and the bid withered. At that point, in fact, as his eyes fell in submission to my determined gaze, I believe the headmastership became mine. It is a largely unexplored element of history, of course, and one that has long

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fascinated me, that a great deal of political power and thus a great deal of the arc of nations arises not from intellectual advancements nor social imperatives but from the simple battle of wills among men at tables, such as had just occurred between Charles Ellerby and me.

Instead of opening the desk and brandishing the weapon, however, which of course meant nothing to me but no doubt would have seized the initiative from Ellerby, I denied to him its existence. Why, I do not know; for I was a teacher of history, and was not the firearm its greatest engine? Ellerby, on the other hand, was simply a gadfly to the passing morals of the time. He gathered his things and left my house.

That evening I took the pistol from my drawer. A margin of rust had appeared along the filigreed handle, and despite the ornate workmanship I saw clearly now that in its essence the weapon was ill-proportioned and blunt, the crude instrument of a violent, historically meager man. I had not even wanted it when the irascible demagogue Bell had foisted it upon me, and I had only taken it out of some vague sentiment that a pistol might eventually prove decisive. I suppose I had always imagined firing it someday in a moment of drama. Yet now, here it stood before me in a moment of torpor. I turned it over and cursed it.

That night I took it from the drawer again, hid it in the pocket of my overcoat and walked to the far end of the campus, where I crossed the marsh a good mile from my house, removed my shoes and stepped into the babbling shallows of the Passamic. *The die is cast*, I said, and I threw it twenty yards out into the water. The last impediment to my headmastership had been hurdled, and by the time I came ashore, walked back whistling to my front door, and changed for bed, I was ecstatic.

Yet that night I slept poorly, and in the morning when I rose and went to our faculty meeting, I felt that the mantle of my fortitude had slipped somehow from my shoulders. How hushed is demise! In the hall outside the faculty room, most of the teachers filed by without speaking to me, and

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once inside I became obsessed with the idea that I had missed this most basic lesson of the past, that conviction is the alpha and the omega of authority. Now I see that I was doomed the moment I threw that pistol in the water, for that is when I lost my conviction. It was as though Sedgewick Bell had risen, all these years later, to drag me down again. Indeed, once the meeting had begun, the older faculty members shrunk back from their previous support of my bid, and the younger ones encircled me as though I were a limping animal. There might as well have been a dagger among the cloaks. By four o'clock that afternoon, Charles Ellerby, a fellow antiquarian whose job I had once helped secure, had been named headmaster, and by the end of that month he had asked me to retire.

And so I was preparing to end my days at St. Benedict's when I received Sedgewick Bell's response to my letter. It was well-written, which I noted with pleasure, and contained no trace of rancor, which is what every teacher hopes to see in the maturation of his disagreeable students. In closing he asked me to call him at EastAmerica Steel, and I did so that afternoon. When I gave my name first to one secretary and then to a second, and after that, moments later, heard Sedgewick's artfully guileless greeting, I instantly recalled speaking to his father forty years before.

After small talk, including my condolences about his father, he told me that the reason he had returned my letter was that he had often dreamed of holding a rematch of Mister Julius Caesar, and that he was now willing to donate a large sum of money to St. Benedict's if I would agree to administer the event. Naturally, I assumed he was joking and passed off the idea with a comment about how funny it was, but Sedgewick Bell repeated the invitation. He wanted very much to be on stage again with Deepak Mehta and Clay Walter. I suppose I should not have been surprised, for it is precisely this sort of childhood slight that will drive a great figure. I told him that I was about to retire. He expressed sympathy but then

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suggested that the arrangement could be ideal, as now I would no doubt have time to prepare. Then he said that at this station in his life he could afford whatever he wanted materially—with all that this implied, of course, concerning his donation to the Annual Fund—but that more than anything else, he desired the chance to reclaim his intellectual honor. I suppose I was flattered.

Of course, he also offered a good sum of money to me personally. Although I had until then led a life in which finances were never more than a distant concern, I was keenly aware that my time in the school's houses and dining halls was coming to an end. On the one hand, it was not my burning aspiration to secure an endowment for the reign of Charles Ellerby; on the other hand, I needed the money, and I felt a deep loyalty to the school regarding the Annual Fund. That evening, I began to prepare my test.

As assistant headmaster, I had not taught my beloved Roman history in many years, so that poring through my reams of notes was like returning at last to my childhood home. I stopped here and there among the files. I reread the term paper of young Derek Bok on "The Search of Diogenes," and the scrawled one of James Watson on "Archimedes's Method." Among the art projects, I found John Updike's reproduction of the Obelisk of Cleopatra, and a charcoal drawing of the baths of Caracalla by the abstract expressionist, Robert Motherwell, unfortunately torn in two and no longer worth anything.

I had always been a diligent notetaker, furthermore, and I believe that what I came up with was a surprisingly accurate reproduction of the subjects on which I had once quizzed Clay Walter, Deepak Mehta and Sedgewick Bell, nearly half a century before. It took me only two evenings to gather enough material for the task, although in order not to appear eager I waited several days before sending off another letter to Sedgewick Bell. He called me soon after.

It is indeed a surprise to one who toils for his own keep to see the formidable strokes with which our captains of industry

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demolish the tasks before them. The morning after talking to Sedgewick Bell I received calls from two of his secretaries, a social assistant and a woman at a New York travel agency, who confirmed the arrangements for late July, two months hence. The event was to take place on an island off the Outer Banks of Carolina that belonged to EastAmerica Steel, and I sent along a list from the St. Benedict's archives so that everyone in Sedgewick Bell's class would be invited.

I was not prepared, however, for the days of retirement that intervened. What little remained of that school year passed speedily in my preoccupation, and before I knew it the boys were taking their final exams. I tried not to think about my future. At the commencement exercises in June, a small section of the ceremony was spent in my honor, but it was presided over by Charles Ellerby and gave rise to a taste of copper in my throat. "And thus we bid adieu," he began, "to our beloved Mr. Hundert." He gazed out over the lectern, extended his arm in my direction, and proceeded to give a nostalgic rendering of my years at the school to the audience of jacketed businessmen, parasoled ladies, students in St. Benedict's blazers and children in church suits, who, like me, were squirming at the meretriciousness of the man.

Yet how quickly it was over! Awards were presented, "Hail Fair Benedict's" was sung, and as the birches began to lean their narrow shadows against the distant edge of the marsh, the seniors came forward to receive their diplomas. The mothers wept, the alumni stood misty-eyed, and the graduates threw their hats into the air. Afterward, everyone dispersed for the headmaster's reception.

I wish now that I had made an appearance there, for to have missed it, the very last one of my career, was a far more grievous blow to me than to Charles Ellerby. Furthermore, the handful of senior boys who over their tenure had been pierced by the bee-sting of history no doubt missed my presence or at least wondered at its lack. I spent the remnants of the afternoon in my house, and the evening walking out along the marsh, where the smell of woodsmoke from a farmer's

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bonfire and the distant sounds of the gathered celebrants filled me with the great, sad pride of teaching. My boys were passing once again into the world without me.

The next day, of course, parents began arriving to claim their children; jitney buses ferried students to airports and train stations; the groundsman went around pulling up lacrosse goals and baseball bleachers, hauling the long black sprinkler hoses behind his tractor into the fields. I spent most of that day and the next one sitting at the desk in my study, watching through the window as the school wound down like a clockspring toward the strange, bird-filled calm of that second afternoon of my retirement, when all the boys had left and I was alone, once again, in the eerie quiet of summer. I own few things besides my files and books; I packed them, and the next day the groundsman drove me into Woodmere.

There I found lodging in a splendid Victorian rooming house run by a descendant of Nat Turner who joked, when I told her that I was a newly retired teacher, about how the house had always welcomed escaped slaves. I was surprised at how heartily I laughed at this, which had the benefit of putting me instantly on good terms with the landlady. We negotiated a monthly rent, and I went upstairs to set about charting a new life for myself. I was seventy-one years old—yes, perhaps, too old to be headmaster—but I could still walk three miles before dinner and did so the first afternoon of my freedom. However, by evening my spirits had taken a beating.

Fortunately, there was the event to prepare for, as I fear that without it, those first days and nights would have been unbearable. I pored again and again over my old notes, extracting devilish questions from the material. But this only occupied a few hours of the day, and by late morning my eyes would grow weary. Objectively speaking, the start of that summer should have been no different from the start of any other; yet it was. Passing my reflection in the hallway mirror at the head of the stairs on my way down to dinner I would think to myself, *is that you*? and on the way back up to my room, *what now*? I wrote letters to my brothers and sister,

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and to several of my former boys. The days crawled by. I introduced myself to the town librarian. I made the acquaintance of a retired railroad man who liked as much as I did to sit on the grand, screened porch of that house. I took the bus into Washington a few times to spend the day in museums.

But as the summer progressed, a certain dread began to form in my mind, which I tried through the diligence of walking, museum-going and reading, to ignore; that is, I began to fear that Sedgewick Bell had forgotten about the event. The thought would occur to me in the midst of the long path along the outskirts of town; and as I reached the Passamic, took my break and then started back again toward home, I would battle with my urge to contact the man. Several times I went to the telephone downstairs in the rooming house and twice I wrote out letters that I did not send. *Why would he go through all the trouble just to mock me?* I thought; but then I would recall the circumstances of his tenure at St. Benedict's and a darker gloom would descend upon me. I began to have second thoughts about events that had occurred half a century before: should I have confronted him in the midst of the original contest? Should I never even have leap-frogged another boy to get him there? Should I have spoken up to the senator?

In early July, however, Sedgewick Bell's secretary finally did call, and I felt that I had been given a reprieve. She apologized for her tardiness, asked me more questions about my taste in food and lodging, and then informed me of the date, three weeks later, when a car would call to take me to the airport in Williamsburg. An EastAmerica jet would fly me from there to Charlotte, from whence I was to be picked up by helicopter.

Helicopter! Less than a month later I stood before the craft, which was painted head to tail in EastAmerica's green and gold insignia, polished to a shine, with a six-man passenger bay and red white and blue sponsons over the wheels. One does not remain at St. Benedict's for five decades without gaining a certain familiarity with privilege, yet as it lifted me off the pad in Charlotte, hovered for a moment, then lowered

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its nose and turned eastward over the gentle hills and then the chopping slate of the sea channel, I felt a headiness that I had never known before; it was what Augustus Caesar must have felt millennia ago, carried head-high on a litter past the Tiber. I clutched my notes to my chest. Indeed I wondered what my life might have been like if I had felt this just once in my youth. The rotors buzzed like a beehive. On the island I was shown to a suite of rooms in a high corner of the lodge, with windows and balconies overlooking the sea.

For a conference on the future of childhood education or the plight of America's elderly, of course, you could not get one tenth of these men to attend, but for a privileged romp on a private island it had merely been a matter of making the arrangements. I stood at the window of my room and watched the helicopter ferry back and forth across the channel, disgorging on the island a *Who's Who* of America's largest corporations, universities and organs of policy.

Oh, but what it was to see the boys! After a time, I made my way back out to the airstrip, and whenever the craft touched down on the landing platform and one or another of my old students ducked out, clutching his suit lapel as he ran clear of the snapping rotors, I was struck anew with how great a privilege my profession had been.

That evening all of us ate together in the lodge, and the boys toasted me and took turns coming to my table, where several times one or another of them had to remind me to continue eating my food. Sedgewick Bell ambled over and with a charming air of modesty showed me the flashcards of Roman history that he'd been keeping in his desk at EastAmerica. Then, shedding his modesty, he went to the podium and produced a long and raucous toast referring to any number of pranks and misdeeds at St. Benedict's that I had never even heard of but that the chorus of boys greeted with stamps and whistles. At a quarter to nine, they all dropped their forks onto the floor, and I fear that tears came to my eyes.

The most poignant part of all, however, was how plainly the faces of the men still showed the eager expressiveness of

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the first-form boys of forty years ago. Martin Blythe had lost half his leg as an officer in Korea, and now, among his classmates, he tried to hide his lurching stride, but he wore the same knitted brow that he used to wear in my classroom; Deepak Mehta, who had become a professor of Asian history, walked with a slight stoop, yet he still turned his eyes downward when spoken to; Clay Walter seemed to have fared physically better than his mates, bouncing about in the Italian suit and alligator shoes of the advertising industry, yet he was still drawn immediately to the other do-nothings from his class.

But of course it was Sedgewick Bell who commanded everyone's attention. He had grown stout across the middle and bald over the crown of his head, and I saw in his ear, although it was artfully concealed, the flesh-colored bulb of a hearing aid; yet he walked among the men like a prophet. Their faces grew animated when he approached, and at the tables I could see them competing for his attention. He patted one on the back, whispered in the ear of another, gripped hands and grasped shoulders and kissed the wives on the lips. His walk was firm and imbued not with the seriousness of his post, it seemed to me, but with the ease of it, so that his stride among the tables was jocular. He was the host and clearly in his element. His laugh was voluble.

I went to sleep early that evening so that the boys could enjoy themselves downstairs in the saloon, and as I lay in bed I listened to their songs and revelry. It had not escaped my attention, of course, that they no doubt spent some time mocking me, but this is what one grows to expect in my post, and indeed it was part of the reason I left them alone. Although I was tempted to walk down and listen from outside the theater, I did not.

The next day was spent walking the island's serpentine spread of coves and beaches, playing tennis on the grass court, and paddling in wooden boats on the small, inland lake behind the lodge. How quickly one grows accustomed to luxury! Men and women lounged on the decks and beaches and patios, sunning like seals, gorging themselves on the largess of their host.

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As for me, I barely had a moment to myself, for the boys took turns at my entertainment. I walked with Deepak Mehta along the beach and succeeded in getting him to tell me the tale of his rise through academia to a post at Columbia University. Evidently his rise had taken a toll, for although he looked healthy enough to me he told me that he had recently had a small heart attack. It was not the type of thing one talked about with a student, however, so I let this revelation pass without comment. Later, Clay Walter brought me onto the tennis court and tried to teach me to hit a ball, an activity that drew a crowd of boisterous guests to the stands. They roared at Clay's theatrical antics and cheered and stomped their feet whenever I sent one back across the net. In the afternoon, Martin Blythe took me out in a rowboat.

St. Benedict's, of course, has always had a more profound effect than most schools on the lives of its students, yet nonetheless it was strange that once in the center of the pond, where he had rowed us with his lurching stroke, Martin Blythe set down the oars in their locks and told me he had something he'd always meant to ask me.

"Yes," I said.

He brushed back his hair with his hand. "*I* was supposed to be the one up there with Deepak and Clay, wasn't I, sir?"

"Don't tell me you're still thinking about that."

"It's just that I've sometimes wondered what happened."

"Yes, you should have been," I said.

Oh, how little we understand of men if we think that their childhood slights are forgotten! He smiled. He did not press the subject further, and while I myself debated the merits of explaining why I had passed him over for Sedgewick Bell four decades before, he pivoted the boat around and brought us back to shore. The confirmation of his suspicions was enough to satisfy him, it seemed, so I said nothing more. He had been an Air Force major in our country's endeavors on the Korean peninsula, yet as he pulled the boat onto the beach I had the clear feeling of having saved him from some torment.

Indeed, that evening when the guests had gathered in the

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lodge's small theater, and Deepak Mehta, Clay Walter and Sedgewick Bell had taken their seats for the reenactment of Mister Julius Caesar, I noticed an ease in Martin Blythe's face that I believe I had never seen in it before. His brow was not knit, and he had crossed his legs so that above one sock we could clearly see the painted wooden calf.

It was then that I noticed that the boys who had paid the most attention to me that day were in fact the ones sitting before me on the stage. How dreadful a thought this was—that they had indulged me to gain advantage—but I put it from my mind and stepped to the microphone. I had spent the late afternoon reviewing my notes, and the first rounds of questions were called from memory.

The crowd did not fail to notice the feat. There were whistles and stomps when I named fifteen of the first sixteen emperors in order and asked Clay Walter to produce the one I had left out. There was applause when I spoke Caesar's words, "*Il Iacta alea esto*," and then, continuing in carefully pronounced Latin, asked Sedgewick Bell to recall the circumstances of their utterance. He had told me that afternoon of the months he had spent preparing, and as I was asking the question, he smiled. The boys had not worn togas, of course—although I personally feel they might have—yet the situation was familiar enough that I felt a rush of unease as Sedgewick Bell's smile then waned and he hesitated several moments before answering. But this time, all these years later, he looked straight out into the audience and spoke his answers with the air of a scholar.

It was not long before Clay Walter had dropped out, of course, but then, as it had before, the contest proceeded neck and neck between Sedgewick Bell and Deepak Mehta. I asked Sedgewick Bell about Caesar's battles at Pharsalus and Thapsus, about the shift of power to Constantinople and about the war between the patricians and the plebeians; I asked Deepak Mehta about the Punic Wars, the conquest of Italy and the fall of the republic. Deepak, of course, had an advantage, for certainly he had studied this material at university,

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but I must say that the straightforward determination of Sedgewick Bell had begun to win my heart. I recalled the bashful manner in which he had shown me his flashcards at dinner the night before, and as I stood now before the microphone I seemed to be in the throes of an affection for him that had long been under wraps.

"What year were the Romans routed at Lake Trasimene?" I asked him.

He paused. "217 B.C., I believe."

"Which general later became Scipio Africanus Major?"

"Publius Cornelius Scipio, sir." Deepak Mehta answered softly.

It does not happen as often as one might think that an unintelligent boy becomes an intelligent man, for in my own experience the love of thought is rooted in an age long before adolescence; yet Sedgewick Bell now seemed to have done just that. His answers were spoken with the composed demeanor of a scholar. There is no one I like more, of course, than the man who is moved by the mere fact of history, and as I contemplated the next question to him I wondered if I had indeed exaggerated the indolence of his boyhood. Was it true, perhaps, that he had simply not come into his element yet while at St. Benedict's? He peered intently at me from the stage, his elbows on his knees. I decided to ask him a difficult question. "Chairman Bell," I said, "which tribes invaded Rome in 102 B.C.?"

His eyes went blank and he curled his shoulders in his suit. Although he was by then one of the most powerful men in America, and although moments before that I had been rejoicing in his discipline, suddenly I saw him on that stage once again as a frightened boy. How powerful is memory! And once again, I feared that it was I who had betrayed him. He brought his hand to his head to think.

"Take your time, sir," I offered.

There were murmurs in the audience. He distractedly touched the side of his head. A man's character is his fate, says Heraclitus, and at that moment, as he brushed his hand

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down over his temple, I realized that the flesh-colored device in his ear was not a hearing aid but a transmitter through which he was receiving the answers to my questions. Nausea rose in me. Of course I had no proof, but was it not exactly what I should have expected? He touched his head once again and appeared to be deep in thought, and I knew it as certainly as if he had shown me. "The Teutons," he said, haltingly, "and—I'll take a stab here—the Cimbri?"

I looked for a long time at him. Did he know at that point what I was thinking? I cannot say, but after I had paused as long as I could bear to in front of that crowd, I cleared my throat and granted that he was right. Applause erupted. He shook it off with a wave of his hand. I knew that it was my duty to speak up. I knew it was my duty as a teacher to bring him clear of the moral dereliction in which I myself had been his partner, yet at the same time I felt myself adrift in the tide of my own vacillation and failure. The boy had somehow got hold of me again. He tried to quiet the applause with a wave of his hand, but this gesture only caused the clapping to increase, and I am afraid to say that it was merely the sound of a throng of boisterous men that finally prevented me from making my stand. Quite suddenly I was aware that this was not the situation I had known at St. Benedict's School. We were guests now of a significant man on his splendid estate, and to expose him would be a serious act indeed. I turned and quieted the crowd.

From the chair next to Sedgewick Bell, Deepak Mehta merely looked at me, his eyes dark and resigned. Perhaps he too had just realized, or perhaps in fact he had long known, but in any case I simply asked him the next question; after he answered it, I could do nothing but put another before Sedgewick Bell. Then Deepak again, then Sedgewick, and again to Deepak, and it was only then, on the third round after I had discovered the ploy, that an idea came to me. When I returned to Sedgewick Bell I asked him, "Who was Shutruk-Nahhunte?"

A few boys in the crowd began to laugh, and when Sedge-

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wick Bell took his time thinking about the answer, more in the audience joined in. Whoever was the mercenary professor talking in his ear, it was clear to me that he would not know the answer to this one, for if he had not gone to St. Benedict's School he would never have heard of Shutruk-Nahhunte; and in a few moments, sure enough, I saw Sedgewick Bell begin to grow uncomfortable. He lifted his pant leg and scratched at his sock. The laughter increased, and then I heard the wives, who had obviously never lived in a predatory pack, trying to stifle their husbands. "Come on, Bell!" someone shouted, "Look at the damn door!" Laughter erupted again.

How can it be that for a moment my heart bled for him? He, too, tried to laugh, but only half-heartedly. He shifted in his seat, shook his arms loose in his suit, looked uncomprehendingly out at the snickering crowd, then braced his chin and said, "Well, I guess if Deepak knows the answer to this one, then it's *his* ballgame."

Deepak's response was nearly lost in the boisterous stamps and whistles that followed, for I am sure that every boy but Sedgewick recalled Henry Stimson's tablet above the door of my classroom. Yet what was strange was that I felt disappointment. As Deepak Mehta smiled, spoke the answer, and stood from his chair, I watched confusion and then a flicker of panic cross the face of Sedgewick Bell. He stood haltingly. How clear it was to me then that the corruption in his character had always arisen from fear, and I could not help remembering that as his teacher I had once tried to convince him of his stupidity. I cursed that day. But then in a moment he summoned a smile, called me up to the stage, and crossed theatrically to congratulate the victor.

How can I describe the scene that took place next? I suppose I was naïve to think that this was the end of the evening—or even the point of it—for after Sedgewick Bell had brought forth a trophy for Deepak Mehta, and then one for me as well, an entirely different cast came across his features. He strode once again to the podium and asked for the attention of the guests. He tapped sharply on the microphone. Then

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he leaned his head forward, and in a voice that I recognized from long ago on the radio, a voice in whose deft leaps from boom to whisper I heard the willow-tree drawl of his father, he launched into an address about the problems of our country. He had the orator's gift of dropping his volume at the moment when a less gifted man would have raised it. *We have opened our doors to all the world*, he said, his voice thundering, then pausing, then plunging nearly to a murmur, *and now the world has stripped us bare*. He gestured with his hands. The men in the audience, first laughing, now turned serious. *We have given away too much for too long*, he said. *We have handed our fiscal leadership to men who don't care about the taxpayers of our country, and our moral course to those who no longer understand our role in history*. Although he gestured to me there, I could not return his gaze. *We have abandoned the moral education of our families*. Scattered applause drifted up from his classmates, and here, of course, I almost spoke. *We have left our country adrift on dangerous seas*. Now the applause was more hearty. Then he quieted his voice again, dropped his head as though in supplication and announced that he was running for the United States Senate.

Why was I surprised? I should not have been, for since childhood the boy had stood so near to the mantle of power that its shadow must have been as familiar to him as his boyhood home. Virtue had no place in the palaces he had known. I was ashamed when I realized he had contrived the entire rematch of Mister Julius Caesar for no reason other than to gather his classmates for donations, yet still I chastened myself for not realizing his ambition before. In his oratory, in his physical presence, in his conviction, he had always possessed the gifts of a leader, and now he was using them. I should have expected this from the first day he stood in his short-pants suit in the doorway of my classroom and silenced my students. He already wielded a potent role in the affairs of our country; he enjoyed the presumption of his family name; he was blindly ignorant of history and therefore did not fear his role in it. Of course it was exactly the culmination I should long ago have seen. The crowd stood cheering.

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As soon as the clapping abated a curtain was lifted behind him, and a band struck up Dixie. Waiters appeared at the side doors, a dance platform was unfolded in the orchestra pit, and Sedgewick Bell jumped down from the stage into the crowd of his friends. They clamored around him. He patted shoulders, kissed wives, whispered and laughed and nodded his head. I saw checkbooks come out. The waiters carried champagne on trays at their shoulders, and at the edge of the dance floor the women set down their purses and stepped into the arms of their husbands. When I saw this I ducked out a side door and returned to the lodge, for the abandon with which the guests were dancing was an unbearable counterpart to the truth I knew. One can imagine my feelings. I heard the din late into the night.

Needless to say, I resolved to avoid Sedgewick Bell for the remainder of my stay. How my mind raced that night through humanity's endless history of injustice, depravity and betrayal! I could not sleep, and several times I rose and went to the window to listen to the revelry. Standing at the glass I felt like the spurned sovereign in the castle tower, looking down from his balcony onto the procession of the false potentate.

Yet, sure enough, my conviction soon began to wane. No sooner had I resolved to avoid my host than I began to doubt the veracity of my secret knowledge about him. Other thoughts came to me. How, in fact, had I been so sure of what he'd done? What proof had I at all? Amid the distant celebrations of the night, my conclusion began to seem farfetched, and by the quiet of the morning I was muddled. I did not go to breakfast. As boy after boy stopped by my rooms to wish me well, I assiduously avoided commenting on either Sedgewick Bell's performance or on his announcement for the Senate. On the beach that day I endeavored to walk by myself, for by then I trusted neither my judgment of the incident nor my discretion with the boys. I spent the afternoon alone in a cove across the island.

I did not speak to Sedgewick Bell that entire day. I managed to avoid him, in fact, until the next evening, by which time

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all but a few of the guests had left, when he came to bid farewell as I stood on the tarmac awaiting the helicopter for the mainland. He walked out and motioned for me to stand back from the platform, but I pretended not to hear him and kept my eyes up to the sky. Suddenly, the shining craft swooped in from beyond the wave break, churning the channel into a boil, pulled up in a hover and then touched down on its flag-colored sponsons before us. The wind and noise could have thrown a man to the ground, and Sedgewick Bell seemed to pull at me like a magnet, but I did not retreat. It was he, finally, who ran out to me. He gripped his lapels, ducked his head and offered me his hand. I took it tentatively, the rotors whipping our jacket-sleeves. I had been expecting this moment and had decided the night before what I was going to say. I leaned toward him. "How long have you been hard of hearing?" I asked.

His smile dropped. I cannot imagine what I had become in the mind of that boy. "Very good, Hundert," he said. "Very good. I thought you might have known."

My vindication was sweet, although now I see that it meant little. By then I was on the ladder of the helicopter, but he pulled me toward him again and looked darkly into my eyes. "And I see that *you* have not changed either," he said.

Well, had I? As the craft lifted off and turned westward toward the bank of clouds that hid the distant shoreline, I analyzed the situation with some care. The wooden turrets of the lodge grew smaller and then were lost in the trees, and I found it easier to think then, for everything on that island had been imbued with the sheer power of the man. I relaxed a bit in my seat. One could say that in this case I indeed had acted properly, for is it not the glory of our legal system that acquitting a guilty man is less heinous than convicting an innocent one? At the time of the contest, I certainly had no proof of Sedgewick Bell's behavior.

Yet back in Woodmere, as I have intimated, I found myself with a great deal of time on my hands, and it was not long

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before the incident began to replay itself in my mind. Following the wooded trail toward the river or sitting in the breeze at dusk on the porch, I began to see that a different ending would have better served us all. Conviction had failed me again. I was well aware of the foolish consolation of my thoughts, yet I vividly imagined what I should have done. I heard myself speaking up; I saw my resolute steps to his chair on the stage, then the insidious, flesh-colored device in my palm, held up to the crowd; I heard him stammering.

As if to mock my inaction, however, stories of his electoral effort soon began to appear in the papers. It was a year of spite and rancor in our country's politics, and the race in West Virginia was less a campaign than a brawl between gladiators. The incumbent was as versed in treachery as Sedgewick Bell, and over my morning tea I followed their battles. Sedgewick Bell called him "a liar when he speaks and a crook when he acts," and he called Sedgewick Bell worse. A fistfight erupted when their campaigns crossed at an airport.

I was revolted by the spectacle, but of course I was also intrigued, and I cannot deny that although I was rooting for the incumbent, a part of me was also cheered at each bit of news chronicling Sedgewick Bell's assault on his lead. Oh, why was this so? Are we all, at base, creatures without virtue? Is fervor the only thing we follow?

Needless to say, that fall had been a difficult one in my life, especially those afternoons when the St. Benedict's bus roared by the guest house in Woodmere taking the boys to track meets, and perhaps the Senate race was nothing more than a healthy distraction for me. Indeed I needed distractions. To witness the turning of the leaves and to smell the apples in their barrels without hearing the sound of a hundred boys in the fields, after all, was almost more than I could bear. My walks had grown longer, and several times I had crossed the river and ventured to the far end of the marsh, from where in the distance I could make out the blurred figures of St. Benedict's. I knew this was not good for me, and perhaps that is why, in late October of that year when I read that Sedgewick

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Bell would be making a campaign stop at a coal-miners' union hall near the Virginia border, I decided to go hear him speak.

Perhaps by then the boy had become an obsession for me—I will admit this, for I am as aware as anyone that time is but the thinnest bandage for our wounds—but on the other hand, the race had grown quite close and would have been of natural interest to anyone. Sedgewick Bell had drawn himself up from an underdog to a challenger. Now it was clear that the election hinged on the votes of labor, and Sedgewick Bell, though he was the son of aristocrats and the chairman of a formidable corporation, began to cast himself as a champion of the working man. From newspaper reports I gleaned that he was helped along by the power of his voice and bearing, and I could easily imagine these men turning to him. I well knew the charisma of the boy.

The day arrived, and I packed a lunch and made the trip. As the bus wound west along the river valley, I envisioned the scene ahead and wondered whether Sedgewick Bell would at this point care to see me. Certainly I represented some sort of truth to him about himself, yet at the same time I also seemed to have become a part of the very delusion that he had foisted on those around him. How far my boys would always stride upon the world's stage, yet how dearly I would always hope to change them! The bus arrived early, and I went inside the union hall to wait.

Shortly before noon the miners began to come in. I don't know what I had expected, but I was surprised to see them looking as though they had indeed just come out of the mines. They wore hard hats, their faces were stained with dust, and their gloves and tool belts hung at their waists. For some reason I had worn my St. Benedict's blazer, which I now removed. Reporters began to filter in as well, and by the time the noon whistle blew, the crowd was overflowing from the hall.

As the whistle subsided I heard the thump-thump of his helicopter, and through the door in a moment I saw the twisters of dust as it hovered into view from above. How clever was the man I had known as a boy! The craft had been re-

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painted the colors of military camouflage but he had left the sponsons the red-white-and-blue of their previous incarnation. He jumped from the side door when the craft was still a foot above the ground, entered the hall at a jog and was greeted with an explosion of applause. His aides lined the stairs to the high platform on which the microphone stood under a banner and a flag, and as he crossed the crowd toward them the miners jostled to be near him, knocking their knuckles against his hard hat, reaching for his hands and his shoulders, cheering like Romans at a chariot race.

I do not need to report on his eloquence, for I have dwelled enough upon it. When he reached the staircase and ascended to the podium, stopping first at the landing to wave and then at the top to salute the flag above him, jubilation swept among the throng. I knew then that he had succeeded in his efforts, that these miners counted him somehow as their own, so that when he actually spoke and they interrupted him with cheers it was no more unexpected than the promises he made then to carry their interests with him to the Senate. He was masterful. I found my own arm upraised.

Certainly there were five hundred men in that hall, but there was only one with a St. Benedict's blazer over his shoulder and no hard hat on his head, so of course I should not have been surprised when within a few minutes one of his aides appeared beside me and told me that the candidate had asked for me at the podium. At that moment I saw Sedgewick Bell's glance pause for a moment on my face. There was a flicker of a smile on his lips, but then he looked away.

Is there no battle other than the personal one? Was Sedgewick Bell at that point willing to risk the future of his political ideas for whatever childhood demon I still remained to him? The next time he turned toward me, he gestured down at the floor, and in a moment the aide had pulled my arm and was escorting me toward the platform. The crowd opened as we passed, and the miners in their ignorance and jubilation were reaching to shake my hand. This was indeed a heady feeling. I climbed the steps and stood beside Sedgewick Bell at the

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smaller microphone. How it was to stand above the mass of men like that! He raised his hand and they cheered; he lowered it and they fell silent.

"There is a man here today who has been immeasurably important in my life," he whispered into his microphone.

There was applause, and a few of the men whistled. "Thank you," I said into my own. I could see the blue underbrims of five hundred hard hats turned up toward me. My heart was nearly bursting.

"My history teacher," he said, as the crowd began to cheer again. Flashbulbs popped and I moved instinctively toward the front of the platform. "Mr. Hundert," he boomed, "from forty-five years ago at Richmond Central High School."

It took me a moment to realize what he had said. By then he too was clapping and at the same time lowering his head in what must have appeared to the men below to be respect for me. The blood engorged my veins. "Just a minute," I said, stepping back to my own microphone. "I taught you at St. Benedict's School in Tallywood, Virginia. Here is the blazer."

Of course, it makes no difference in the course of history that as I tried to hold up the coat, Sedgewick Bell moved swiftly across the podium, took it from my grip and raised my arm high in his own and that this pose, of all things, sent the miners into jubilation; it makes no difference that by the time I spoke, he had gestured with this hand so that one of his aides had already shut off my microphone. For one does not alter history without conviction. It is enough to know that I *did* speak, and certainly a consolation that Sedgewick Bell realized, finally, that I would.

He won that election not in small part because he managed to convince those miners that he was one of them. They were ignorant people, and I cannot blame them for taking to the shrewdly populist rhetoric of the man. I saved the picture that appeared the following morning in the *Gazette*: Senator Bell radiating all the populist magnetism of his father, holding high the arm of an old man who has on his face the remnants of a proud and foolish smile.

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I still live in Woodmere, and I have found a route that I take now and then to the single high hill from which I can see the St. Benedict's steeple across the Passamic. I take two walks every day and have grown used to this life. I have even come to like it. I am reading of the ancient Japanese civilizations now, which I had somehow neglected before, and every so often one of my boys visits me.

One afternoon recently, Deepak Mehta did so, and we shared some brandy. This was in the fall of last year. He was still the quiet boy he had always been, and not long after he had taken a seat on my couch I had to turn on the television to ease for him the burden of conversation. As it happened, the Senate Judiciary Committee was holding its famous hearings then, and the two of us sat there watching, nodding our heads or chuckling whenever the camera showed Sedgewick Bell sitting alongside the chairman. I had poured the brandy liberally, and whenever Sedgewick Bell leaned into the microphone and asked a question of the witness, Deepak would mimic his affected southern drawl. Naturally, I could not exactly encourage this behavior, but I did nothing to stop it. When he finished his drink I poured him another. This, of course, is perhaps the greatest pleasure of a teacher's life, to have a drink one day with a man he has known as a boy.

Nonetheless, I only wish we could have talked more than we actually did. But I am afraid that there must always be a reticence between a teacher and his student. Deepak had had another small heart attack, he told me, but I felt it would have been improper of me to inquire more. I tried to bring myself to broach the subject of Sedgewick Bell's history, but here again I was aware that a teacher does not discuss one boy with another. Certainly Deepak must have known about Sedgewick Bell as well, but probably out of his own set of St. Benedict's morals he did not bring it up with me. We watched Sedgewick Bell question the witness and then whisper into the ear of the chairman. Neither of us was surprised at his ascendance, I believe, because both of us were students of history. Yet we did not discuss this either. Still, I wanted

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desperately for him to ask me something more, and perhaps this was why I kept refilling his glass. I wanted him to ask, "How is it to be alone, sir, at this age," or perhaps to say, "You have made a difference in my life, Mr. Hundert." But of course these were not things Deepak Mehta would ever say. A man's character is his character. Nonetheless it was startling, every now and then when I looked over at the sunlight falling across his bowed head, to see that Deepak Mehta, the quietest of my boys, was now an old man.

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NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

FICTION

Ethan Canin is the author of the short story collection, *Emperor of the Air*, and a novel, *Blue River*. "The Palace Thief" is the title story of his collection, to be published by Random House in February.

Marcia Guthridge lives in Chicago, Illinois. "Bones" is her first published story.

Gabriel García Márquez was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1982. He is the author of many short-story collections and novels, including *Love in the Time of Cholera*, translated by **Edith Grossman**. Grossman is a translator and critic of contemporary literature and also the translator of Garcia Márquez's newest collection, *Strange Pilgrims*, which includes "The Saint" and is forthcoming from Knopf.

Jeanette Winterson received the Whitbread Award in 1987 for her first novel, *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, and the John Llewellyn Rhys Memorial Prize in 1988 for *The Passion*. In 1989, she won the E.M. Forster Award from the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters for *Sexing the Cherry*. Her most recent novel, *Written on the Body*, was published earlier this year by Knopf. She resides in London.

POETRY

Bruce Bond's forthcoming book, *Broken Circle*, was awarded the Ring of Fire Award. He is also the author of *Independence Days*, which won the

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R. Gross Award in 1990, and *The Anteroom of Paradise*, winner of the Colladay Award in 1991.

Lucie Brock-Broido teaches creative writing at Columbia University. Her second collection, *The Master Letters*, is forthcoming from Knopf.

Scott Cairns is the author of two books of poetry, *The Translation of Babel* and *The Theology of Doubt*. He is a professor of English at the University of North Texas.

Carl Dennis teaches in the English department of the State University of New York at Buffalo. He is the author of six books of poetry, most recently, *Meetings with Time*, published by Viking Penguin in 1992.

Andrew Feld lives in Boston, Massachusetts where he is employed as a bicycle courier. His poetry has appeared in *Ploughshares* and the *Western Humanities Review*.

Richard Frost is the author of several chapbooks and poetry collections, most recently *The Family Way*, which is forthcoming this year from Devil's Millhopper Press.

Edwin Gallaher is a program administrator for the creative writing program at the University of Houston. His art criticism has appeared recently in *Gulf Coast*.

James Galvin is the author of three books of verse. His most recent publication is a prose work entitled *The Meadow*.

Jorie Graham's new book, *Materialism*, is just out from Ecco Press. She lives and teaches in Iowa City. Previous volumes include *Region of Unlikeness* and *The End of Beauty*.

Marilyn Hacker's poetry has appeared on numerous occasions in *The Paris Review*. A volume of her new and selected poems will be published by Copper Canyon in the spring of 1994.

John Harvey lives in Houston, Texas.

Brooks Haxton is the author of *Traveling Company* and *Dead Reckoning*, both published in 1989.

Gregg Hodges teaches creative writing at Iowa State University. His most recent work is a chapbook entitled *A Music*, published by Windhover Press in 1990.

Mark Irwin's *Against the Meanwhile* was published by Wesleyan University Press in 1989. He teaches in the creative writing program at the University of Denver.

James Longenbach teaches English at the University of Rochester. His most recent book is *Wallace Stevens: The Plain Sense of Things*, published by Oxford in 1991.

Richard Lyons was awarded the Peter I.B. Lavan Younger Poet Award in 1992. His collection, *These Modern Nights*, was published by the University of Missouri Press in 1988. He currently teaches at Rhodes College and Memphis State University.

Cynthia Macdonald is the founder of the creative writing program at the University of Houston and a psychoanalyst with a small practice specializing

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in writer's block. Her collection of poems, *Living Wills: New and Selected Poems*, was published by Knopf in 1991.

W.S. Merwin's numerous volumes of poetry include *The Carriers of Ladders* (1970), for which he was awarded the Pulitzer Prize.

Honor Moore's collection of poems, *Memoir*, was published by Chicory Blue Press in 1988. She is currently completing a biography of her grandmother, the painter Margarett Sargent.

Ezra Pound's (1885–1972) complete *Cantos* was first published by New Directions in 1971. His FBI confession appears in the Documents section of this issue.

James Reiss is the author of *The Breathers*, published by Ecco Press, and *Express*, published by the University of Pittsburgh Press. He divides his time between New York City and Miami University in Ohio, where he is the General Editor of Miami University Press's new poetry series.

Pattiann Rogers was the recipient of the 1990 Texas Institute of Letters Award for her collection of poems, *Splitting & Binding*. Her most recent work is *New and Selected Poems*, which is forthcoming from Milkweed Editions.

David Schloss is the author of two collections of poetry, *The Beloved*, published by Ashland Poetry Press, and *Legends* from Windmill Press. He lives in Cincinnati, Ohio.

Robyn Selman's poetry has appeared in *Ploughshares*, *The Kenyon Review* and *The American Poetry Review*, and her criticism has been published in *The Nation*, *The Kenyon Review* and *The Village Voice*. She works at a photography publishing house in Manhattan.

Frederick Tibbetts's poetry has appeared in *The Yale Review*, *The New Republic* and *Ploughshares*. He lives in Princeton, New Jersey.

Pimone Triplett received an MFA from the Iowa Writer's Workshop in 1990. Her work has been published in *The Mississippi Review* and *Negative Capability*.

Judita Vaičiūnaitė is a noted Lithuanian poet and the author of twelve books of poetry. She is also the definitive translator of Anna Akhmatova into Lithuanian. Her translators, **Viktoria Skrupskelis** and **Stuart Friebert**, are both on the faculty at Oberlin College. Skrupskelis teaches French and writes on contemporary European poetry. Friebert is the director of Oberlin's writing program. The two have just recently completed translating the selected poems of Vaičiūnaitė entitled *Fire, Put out by Fire*.

Karen Volkman's work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Poetry*, *Prairie Schooner* and *The Southern Review*. She is the recipient of an NEA grant for 1993.

Rachel Wetzsteon is the winner of the 1993 National Poetry Series. Her first collection of poems, *The Other Stars*, is forthcoming in 1994.

Susan Wood is a professor of English at Rice University in Houston, Texas. Her most recent collection of poetry, *Campo Santo*, was the Lamont Poetry Selection for 1991 and received the Natalie Ornish Poetry Award from the Texas Institute of Letters.

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INTERVIEWS

Adam Begley (Don DeLillo interview) is a contributing editor of *The Paris Review* and *Lingua Franca*. He contributes frequently to *The New York Times Magazine* and writes a monthly column about books for *Mirabella*.
Claudia Brodsky Lacour (Toni Morrison interview) is a professor at Princeton University.
Elissa Schappell (Morrison interview), is on staff at *The Paris Review*. She teaches creative writing at New York University and is a free-lance writer.

DOCUMENTS

Benjamin Cheever (Cheever Journals), the son of John Cheever, lives in Pleasantville, New York. His novel, *The Partisan* will be published this winter by Atheneum.
James Laughlin (Pound Canto) is the publisher of New Directions.
Michael Reynolds (Hemingway titles), professor of English at North Carolina State University, is the author of *The Young Hemingway* (1986), *Hemingway: The Paris Years* (1989) and *Hemingway: The American Homecoming* (1992), the first three volumes of a five volume biography published by Blackwell.
Charles Scribner III (Gatsby Illuminated), art historian and editor, oversees publication of the work of Fitzgerald and Hemingway at Charles Scribner's Sons.
Richard Sieburth (Pound confession) teaches comparative literature at New York University. New Directions published his edition of Ezra Pound's *Walking Tour in Southern France* earlier this year.
Niccolò Tucci's (Thomas letter) most recent book is *The Rain Came Last & Other Stories*, published in 1990 by New Directions. His major English novels are *Before My Time* and *The Sun and the Moon*. He has published three books and many articles in Italian and lives in New York City.

ART

Larry Rivers's work will be shown at the Marlborough Gallery in Madrid this December.

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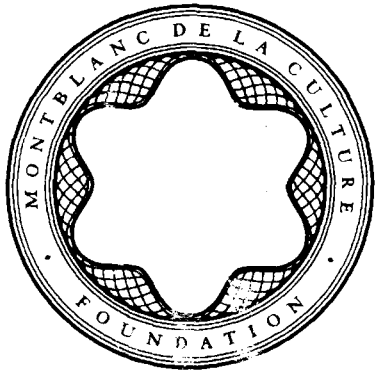
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